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FOREWORD

This booklet has been prepared for the information of members of The American Legion. It has come to be known as the Summary of Proceedings of the National Convention for the current year. It is a comprehensive résumé of what took place at the Ninety-Eighth Annual National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016.

The final report of the national organization for the period ending December 31, 2015, and balance sheet as of December 31, 2015, and surplus analysis, January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2015, are included in the Summary.

To make a quick distribution, speed has been necessary. Every precaution has been taken to avoid errors, but some may have occurred in the rush of Convention events and the haste of editing and printing.

Permission is hereby given to quote from this Summary without further consent. However, because of the nature of our resolution process, I urge that the full text of any resolve clause(s) be used when a quotation from a resolution is required for publication.

Daniel S. Wheeler
National Adjutant

Note: At various times, the national vice commanders, as follows, presided over the Convention sessions, when called upon by the presiding officer, in accordance with the Uniform Code of Procedure as shown in the verbatim proceedings: George E. Cushing, Arizona; Jimmy F. Lane, Arkansas; John W. Hargreaves, Maine; Alan A. Davis, Sr., Minnesota; David L. Gough, Wisconsin.
NATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND NATIONAL OFFICERS
THE AMERICAN LEGION, 1919 to Date

Note: In the following list it should be noted that the terms of each group of officers expire with that particular convention under which they are listed.

* indicates deceased

HONORARY COMMANDERS
General of the Armies of the United States John J. Pershing
Marshall of France Ferdinand Foch

PARIS CAUCUS
Paris, France, March 15 - 17, 1919
Permanent Chairman: Bennett C. Clark*, Missouri (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1926 National Convention)
Chairman Pro Tempore: Thomas W. Miller*, Delaware (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1968 National Convention)
Secretary: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1955 National Convention)

At the Paris Caucus an Executive Committee was elected to complete arrangements, the chairman and secretary of which were:
Chairman: Milton J. Foreman*, Illinois (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1921 National Convention)
Secretary: George A. White*, Oregon

ST. LOUIS CAUCUS
St. Louis, Mo., May 8 - 10, 1919
Temporary Chairman: Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.*, New York (Voted title of Past National Commander at 1949 National Convention)
Permanent Chairman: Henry D. Lindsley*, Texas (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1919 National Convention)
Vice Chairmen: John J. Sullivan*, Washington; Fred Humphrey*, New Mexico; P.C. Calhoun*, Connecticut (Voted titles of Past National Vice Commanders at 1933 National Convention)
Secretary: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1955 National Convention)
Chaplain: Thomas H. Wiles*, Colorado

1st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Minneapolis, Minn., Nov. 10 - 12, 1919

2nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Cleveland, Ohio, Sept. 27 - 29, 1920
Chairman: Franklin D'Olier*, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: James O'Brien*, California; Allan A. Tukey*, Nebraska; Joyce S. Lewis*, Minnesota; Alden B. Chambers*, Massachusetts; William Follett*, Oregon
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Chaplain: Rev. Francis A. Kelly*, New York
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

3rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 31 – Nov. 2, 1921
Chairman: Frederic W. Galbraith, Jr.*, (died June 9); Succeeded by John G. Emery*, Michigan
Milton Foreman*, Illinois, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: John G. Emery*, Michigan; Thomas Goldingay*, New Jersey; Claudius G. Pendill*, Wisconsin; James G. Scrugham*, Nevada; E. Jackson Winslett*, Alabama
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. John W. Inzer*, Tennessee
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

4th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New Orleans, La., Oct. 16 - 20, 1922
Chairman: Hanford MacNider*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: H. Nelson Jackson*, Vermont; George L. Berry*, Tennessee; Raymond O. Brackett*, Massachusetts
Charles H. Kendrick*, California; John A. McCormack*, Colorado
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Earl A. Blackman*, Kansas
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

5th NATIONAL CONVENTION
San Francisco, Calif., Oct. 16 - 19, 1923
Commander: Alvin M. Owlsley*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Edward J. Barrett*, Wisconsin; Watson B. Miller*, District of Columbia; Erle Cocke, Sr.*, Georgia; Robert O. Blood*, New Hampshire; Chiles P. Plummer*, Wyoming
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. William P. O'Connor*, Ohio
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

6th NATIONAL CONVENTION
St. Paul, Minn., Sept. 15 - 19, 1924
Commander: John R. Quinn*, California
Dr. I. Thurman Mann*, North Carolina
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Resigned 2-1-24; Succeeded by Russell G. Creviston*, Indiana
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Ezra Clemens*, Minnesota
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

7th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Omaha, Neb., Oct. 5 - 9, 1925
Commander: James A. Drain*, Washington
Adjutant: Russell G. Creviston*, Indiana
Resigned; Succeeded by James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

8th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 11 - 15, 1926
Commander: John R. McQuigg*, Ohio
Vice Commanders: Joseph Y. Cheney*, Florida; Hughes B. Davis*, Oklahoma;
Vincent A. Carroll*, Pennsylvania;
Raymond B. Littlefield*, Rhode Island;
Judge James A. Howell*, Utah
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. William E. Patrick*, California
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

9th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New York, N.Y., Oct. 18, 1927
Paris, France, Sept. 19 - 22, 1927
Commander: Howard P. Savage*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: C. Thomas Busha, Jr.*, Montana; Stafford King*, Minnesota; John G. Sims*, Tennessee; John E. Curtiss*, Nebraska; Dr. John G. Towne*, Maine
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

10th NATIONAL CONVENTION
San Antonio, Texas, Oct. 8 - 11, 1928
Commander: Edward E. Spafford*, New York
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Gill Robb Wilson*, New Jersey
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

11th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Louisville, Ky., Sept. 30 – Oct. 2, 1929
Commander: Paul V. McNutt*, Indiana
Vice Commanders: Lawrence E. McGann, Jr.*, Illinois; George W. Malone*, Nevada; Edward L. White*, Connecticut; Miller C. Foster*, South Carolina; Walton D. Hood*, Texas
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rabbi Lee J. Levinger*, Delaware
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

12th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Boston, Mass., Oct. 6 - 9, 1930
Commander: O.L. Bodenhamer*, Arkansas
Vice Commanders: Milt D. Campbell*, Ohio; John J. Dugan*, Delaware; Morton M. David*, Colorado; Frank Schoble, Jr.*, Pennsylvania; Willis M. Brewer*, Michigan
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

13th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Detroit, Mich., Sept. 21 - 24, 1931
Commander: Ralph T. O'Neil*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: Bert S. Hyland*, Vermont; Roland B. Howell*, Louisiana; Harry B. Henderson, Jr.*, Wyoming; Dr. James A. Duff*, West Virginia; Dr. Neal D. Williams*, Missouri
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph N. Barnett*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois to 6-24-31; Succeeded by Acting Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

14th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Portland, Ore., Sept. 12 - 15, 1932
Commander: Henry L. Stevens, Jr.*, North Carolina
Vice Commanders: Richard F. Paul*, Massachusetts; Forrest G. Cooper*, Mississippi; Roy L. Cook*, New Mexico; Frank N. Brooks*, Washington; Harold L. Plummer*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Harris A. Darche*, Illinois
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*, Indiana

15th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Oct. 2 - 5, 1933
Commander: Louis A. Johnson*, West Virginia
Vice Commanders: Russell Meadows*, Arizona; Robert D. Flory*, Nebraska; William E. Easterwood, Jr.*, Texas; John J. Maloney*, Maine; Chas. A. Mills*, Florida
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Irwin Q. Wood*, Idaho
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts (died January 22, 1933); Succeeded by Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*, Indiana

16th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Miami, Fla., Oct. 22 - 25, 1934
Commander: Edward A. Hayes*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Charles R. Mabey*, Utah; Robert L. Gordon*, Arkansas; Miguel Munoz*, Puerto Rico; Ed W. Carruth*, Kansas; Charles L. Woolley*, Rhode Island
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Robert J. White*, Massachusetts
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*, Indiana

17th NATIONAL CONVENTION
St. Louis, Mo., Sept. 23 - 26, 1935
Commander: Frank N. Belgrano, Jr.*, California
Vice Commanders: Daniel J. Doherty*, Massachusetts; Harold J. Warner*, Oregon; John K. Kennelly*, North Dakota; Milo J. Warner*, Ohio; Quemoy Melton*, Georgia
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Dr. Park W. Huntington*, Delaware
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: James A. Drain*, Washington
Judge Advocate: James A. Drain*, Washington

18th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Cleveland, Ohio, Sept. 21 - 24, 1936
Commander: Ray Murphy*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: Raymon F. Gates*, Connecticut; Dr. I.E. Whitlock*, Florida; Oscar W. Worth wine*, Idaho; Dr. F. Whitney Godwin*, Virginia; Louis R. Proust*, Wyoming
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas D. Kennedy*, Missouri
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

19th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New York, N.Y., Sept. 20 - 23, 1937
Commander: Harry W. Colmery*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: Salvatore A. Capodice*, California; Leo A. Temmey*, South Dakota; Leonard Sisk*, Tennessee; J. Fred Johnson, Jr.*, Alabama; Jack Crowley*, Vermont
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

20th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Los Angeles, Calif., Sept. 19 - 22, 1938
Commander: Daniel J. Doherty*, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Drury M. Phillips*, Texas; Phil M. Conley*, West Virginia; Harry M. Johnson*, Montana; James F. Daniel, Jr.*, South Carolina; James R. Mahaffy*, Hawaii
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Frank J. Lawler*, Illinois
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

21st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Sept. 25 - 28, 1939
Commander: Stephen F. Chadwick*, Washington
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Jerome L. Fritsche*, Nebraska
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

22nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Boston, Mass., Sept. 23 - 26, 1940
Commander: Raymond J. Kelly*, Michigan
Vice Commanders: Leo E. Ray*, New Hampshire; Charles Q. Kelly*, Arkansas; Matthew J. Murphy*, Illinois; James B. Fitzgerald*, Maryland; H. Elwyn Davis*, Colorado
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Patrick N. McDermott*, Iowa
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

23rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 15 to 18, 1941
Commander: Milo J. Warner*, Ohio
Vice Commanders: Erwin A. Froyd*, Wyoming; James L. McCrory*, Nebraska; Harold P. Redden*, Massachusetts; Edward R. Stirling*, Pennsylvania; Alcee S. Legendre*, Louisiana
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Brigadier William G. Gilks*, Texas
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

24th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 19-21, 1942
Commander: Lynn U. Stambaugh*, North Dakota
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Frederick J. Halloran*, New Jersey
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

25th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Omaha, Neb., Sept. 21 - 23, 1943
Commander: Roane Waring*, Tennessee
Vice Commanders: John T. Batten*, Alabama; Arthur J. Connell*, Connecticut; Fred G. Fraser*, District of Columbia; Herman H. Lark*, Missouri; Jefferson Davis Atwood*, New Mexico
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas, (died July 25); Succeeded by Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan, Acting Adjutant
Chaplain: Dr. Paul De Forrest Mortimore*, Idaho
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

26th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Sept. 18 - 20, 1944
Commander: Warren H. Atherton*, California
Vice Commanders: Martin V. Coffey*, Ohio; E.A. Littlefield*, Utah; Robert 'Roy' McMillan*, North Carolina; Edward Al Mulrooney*, Delaware; Hector G. Staples*, Maine
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

27th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Nov. 18 - 21, 1945
Commander: Edward N. Scheiberling*, New York
Vice Commanders: Bascom F. Jones*, Tennessee; Frank E. McCaffrey*, Rhode Island; Dan M. McDade*, Oregon; Ray S. Pierson*, Kansas; William P. Shadoan*, Kentucky
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. DeWitt C. Mallory*, Florida
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

28th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: John Stelle*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: R. Graham Huntington*, New Jersey; Fred LaBoon*, Oklahoma; Sam L. Latimer, Jr.*, South Carolina; H. Dudley Swim*, Idaho;
Jeremiah Twomey*, Massachusetts
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana, (died 7-13-45); Succeeded by Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

29th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New York, N.Y., Aug. 28 – 31, 1947
Commander: Paul H. Griffith*, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: Joseph W. Brown*, New Hampshire; Martin B. Buckner*, Michigan;
Richard C. Cadwallader*, Louisiana; Ernest H. Dervishian*, Virginia; Edward J. Sharkey*, California
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Arthur L. Rustad*, Minnesota
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

30th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Miami, Fla., Oct. 18 - 20, 1948
Commander: James F. O'Neil*, New Hampshire
Vice Commanders: LeRoy William Barns*, South Dakota; Albert A. Cree*, Vermont;
Richard B. Ott*, Washington; Myron R. Renick*, West Virginia;
Joe W. White*, Georgia
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Frank L. Harrington*, Montana
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

31st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Philadelphia, Pa., Aug. 29 – Sept. 1, 1949
Commander: S. Perry Brown*, Texas
Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.*, (NY), Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: James Lane*, (AL);
Leonard W. Moody*, (AR); James Annin*, (MT); Walter E. Alessandroni*, (PA);
Edward J. Kelly*, (CT)
Chaplain: Rev. Thomas Grice*, (CA)
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, (AL)
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, (IN)
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, (IN)

32nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Los Angeles, Calif., Oct. 9 – 12, 1950
Commander: George N. Craig*, (IN)
Vice Commanders: Milton G. Boock*, (MN); David H. Fleisher*, (MO); Frank E. Lowe*, Maine; J. E. Martie*, (NV); Dr. D. R. Perry*, (NC)
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Edward J. Carney*, O.S.A., Massachusetts
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

33rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Miami, Fla., Oct. 15 – 18, 1951
Commander: Erle Cocke, Jr.*, Georgia
Vice Commanders: Joe H. Adams*, Florida; Herbert J. Jacobi*, District of Columbia; Felix Pogliano*, Colorado; Lewis K. Gough*, California; Fred C. Bramlage*, Kansas
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rabbi David Lefkowitz*, Louisiana
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

34th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New York, N.Y., Aug. 25 – 28, 1952
Commander: Donald R. Wilson*, West Virginia
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Olaf G. Birkeland*, Wisconsin
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana
35th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 31 – Sept. 3, 1953  
Commander: Lewis K. Gough*, California  
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska  
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John E. Duffy*, Ohio  
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

36th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Vice Commanders: John A. High*, New Hampshire; Dr. Deward H. Reed*, New Mexico; Truman C. Wold*, North Dakota; Thomas W. Bird*, North Carolina; Herbert M. Walker*, Pennsylvania  
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska  
Chaplain: Dr. Tom B. Clark*, Oklahoma  
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

37th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Miami, Fla., Oct. 10 – 13, 1955  
Commander: Seaborn P. Collins*, New Mexico  
Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania, Past National Commander  
Vice Commanders: Leonard L. Jackson*, Louisiana; Patrick H. Mangan*, Jr., Vermont; Howard C. Kingdom*, Ohio; Dr. Carl J. Rees*, Delaware; Robert L. Shelby*, Utah  
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska  
Chaplain: Dr. Tom B. Clark*, Oklahoma  
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

38th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Los Angeles, Calif., Sept. 3 – 6, 1956  
Commander: J. Addington Wagner*, Michigan  
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska (resigned); succeeded by E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming  
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph MacCarroll*, New Jersey  
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

39th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Atlantic City, N.J., Sept. 16 – 19, 1957  
Commander: W. C. 'Dan' Daniel*, Virginia  
Vice Commanders: Gaylor M. Brown*, Iowa; George T. Lewis*, Jr., Tennessee; Carl R. Moser*, Oregon; John E. Stay*, Pennsylvania; J. Edward Walter*, Maryland  
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming  
Chaplain: Rev. Bernard W. Gerdon*, Indiana  
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

40th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Chicago, Ill., Sept. 1 – 4, 1958  
Commander: John S. Gleason, Jr.*, Illinois  
Vice Commanders: William A. Cottrell*, Hawaii; Ramon R. Guas*, Puerto Rico; Harry W. Miller*, West Virginia; Leo A. Lemos*, Rhode Island; Isadore E. Levine*, Indiana  
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming  
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Feltham S. James*, South Carolina  
Historian: Mrs. Charles A. (Emily) Herbert*, New Jersey  
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

41st NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 24 – 27, 1959  
Commander: Preston J. Moore*, Oklahoma  
Vice Commanders: C. D. DeLoach*, District of Columbia; John W. Collins*, Pennsylvania; James B. Kerrigan*, Missouri; Robert Charles Smith*, Louisiana; James C. Bangs*, Idaho  
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming  
Historian: Mrs. Charles A. (Emily) Herbert*, New Jersey  
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana  
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

42nd NATIONAL CONVENTION  
Miami Beach, Fla., Oct. 15 – 20, 1960  
Commander: Martin B. McKneally*, New York  
Vice Commanders: William A. Brennan, Jr.*, Indiana; A. Layman Harman*, South Carolina; Nate V. Keller*, Minnesota; (died 7-25-60); Succeeded by Irven Frank
Gianotti*, Minnesota (appointed 9-14-60); Willard W. Brandt*, North Dakota; Charles McGonegal*, California; (died 1-27-60); Succeeded by Corydon T. Hill*, California (appointed 5-4-60)

Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rabbi Robert I. Kahn’ D.H.L., Texas
Historian: Mrs. Charles A. (Emily) Herbert*, New Jersey
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**43rd NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Denver, Colo., Sept. 9 – 14, 1961
Commander: William R. Burke*, California
Vice Commanders: George K. Walker*, Massachusetts; James M. Wagonsseller*, Ohio; Vincent J. Maxheim*, Iowa; Dr. Harry H. Kretzler*, Washington;
R. C. Godwin*, North Carolina
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. William H. Moss*, Tennessee
Historian: Glenn B. Hoover*, Iowa
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**44th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Las Vegas, Nev., Oct. 5 – 11, 1962
Commander: Charles L. Bacon*, Missouri
Edward Wysocki*, New Jersey
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Historian: Earl David Young*, Colorado
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**45th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Miami Beach, Fla., Sept. 6 – 12, 1963
Commander: James E. Powers*, Georgia
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rabbi Albert M. Shulman*, Indiana
Historian: H. Armand de Masi*, Italy
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**46th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Dallas, Texas, Sept. 18 – 24, 1964
Commander: Daniel F. Foley*, Minnesota
Vice Commanders: Earl D. Franklin, Jr.*, Colorado; Emilso I. Iglesias*, Vermont; Garland D. Murphy, Jr.*, M.D., Arkansas; George Emory Sipple*, Wisconsin; Harry Wright*, Mexico
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John J. Howard*, Virginia
Historian: H. Armand de Masi*, Italy
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**47th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Portland, Ore., Aug. 20 – 26, 1965
Commander: Donald E. Johnson*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: David Aronberg*, Kentucky; Herbert D. Black*, South Carolina; Ward W. Husted*, Wyoming; Edward H. Lynch, Jr.*, Connecticut;
Joseph Paul*, Michigan
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Morris N. Dummet*, Louisiana
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**48th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Commander: L. Eldon James*, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Dr. A. R. Choppin*, Louisiana; William E. Galbraith*, Nebraska; Robert O. Phillips*, Philippines; William J. Rogers*, Maine; Tom Soleng*, Arizona
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming (died 4-21-67); Succeeded by Earnest N. Schmit*, North Dakota (Appointed 5-4-67)
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

**49th NATIONAL CONVENTION**
Commander: John E. Davis*, North Dakota
Vice Commanders: Robert M. Fritz*, Indiana; Lewis W. Emerich*, Texas; Harry V. Klein*, Pennsylvania; Frank L. Orfanello*, Massachusetts;
James A. Tadlock*, New Mexico
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

50th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New Orleans, La., Sept. 6 – 12, 1968
Commander: William E. Galbraith*, Nebraska
Thomas W. Miller*, Nevada, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Coleman Nolen*, Oklahoma; Louis R. J. Malo*, Rhode Island; Roscoe D. Curtiss*, Tennessee; Dr. Edwin L. Peterson*, Utah; Marvin W. Roth*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Edward P. Nolan*, Pennsylvania
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

51st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Atlanta, Ga., Aug. 22 – 28, 1969
Commander: William C. Doyle*, New Jersey
Vice Commanders: C. Russell Huber*, Alaska; John A. Jones*, West Virginia; Howard E. Lohman*, Minnesota; Lewis E. McCray*, Alabama; Maurice Parisien*, Maine
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. C. J. Olander*, Mississippi
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

52nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: J. Milton Patrick*, Oklahoma
Vice Commanders: Kent. T. Lundgren*, Michigan; Roland D. Marble*, Mississippi; Raymond F. Mudge*, New Hampshire; Earl R. Norgard*, Oregon; Gilberto M. Font*, Puerto Rico
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. William D. Curtis*, Minnesota
Historian: John A. May*, South Carolina
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

53rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Houston, Texas, Aug. 27 – Sept. 2, 1971
Commander: Alfred P. Chamie*, California
Vice Commanders: Claude Carpenter*, Arkansas; Max Hanson*, Idaho; Robert E.L. Eaton*, Maryland; Gabriel T. Olga*, Massachusetts; John E. Gilbert*, Pennsylvania
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Milton B. Faust*, North Carolina
Historian: Howard M. Swinney*, Kentucky
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

54th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Aug. 18 – 24, 1972
Commander: John H. Geiger*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Howard W. Fann*, Kentucky; Arthur M. MacCarthy*, Florida; Roy Sweet*, Vermont; Harry G. Wiles*, Kansas; Wallace C.S. Young*, Hawaii
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Paul J. Schwaab*, Nebraska
Historian: G. Greer McCallister*, Ohio
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

55th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 17 – 23, 1973
Commander: Joe L. Matthews*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Tim T. Craig*, North Carolina; Sam Gray*, California; Donald L. Gruenbaum*, Ohio; Albert J. Moeller*, New Jersey; Raymond J. Novak*, South Dakota
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. L. P. Fitzpatrick*, Iowa
Historian: Mrs. Loretta O. Phillips*, California
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

56th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Miami Beach, Fla., Aug. 16 – 22, 1974
Commander: Robert E. L. Eaton*, Maryland
Vice Commanders: John N. Roberto*, Connecticut; Frank C. Brooks*, Washington; Gilbert E. Sheeks*, Indiana; Merrick W. Swords, Jr.*, Louisiana; N. E. Brown*, South Carolina
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Jerome D. Fortenberry, Missouri
Historian: R. Robert Filter*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

57th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 15 – 21, 1975
Commander: James M. Wagonseller*, Ohio
Maurice Stember*, New York, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Boyd H. Clemens, North Dakota; Jack W. Flynt*, Texas; Jay E. Harville*, Tennessee; Donald H. Jeffery*, Pennsylvania; William A. Lindsay*, Montana
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Harvey T. Goodling*, Oregon
Historian: Nolie C. Deas, Sr.*, Florida
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

58th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Seattle, Wash., Aug. 20 – 26, 1976
Commander: Harry G. Wiles*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: John W. Adams, Jr., Kentucky; Fred W. Anderson, Jr.*, Nevada; Leo F. Malloy*, Massachusetts; Thomas W. Miller*, Arkansas; James F. Walker*, Minnesota
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Claude E. Smithmier, Georgia
Historian: Mrs. Dorothy Crimes*, Colorado
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

59th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Denver, Colo., Aug. 19 – 25, 1977
Commander: William J. Rogers*, Maine
Vice Commanders: Lloyd J. Berken*, Wisconsin; Thomas B. Coll’, District of Columbia; Robert B. Grauberger*, Colorado; Frank A. Kelly, Georgia; Wilbur Walker*, Virginia
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. James C. Tuxbury, North Dakota
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

60th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New Orleans, La., Aug. 18 – 24, 1978
Commander: Robert Charles Smith*, Louisiana
Vice Commanders: Eugene V. Lindquist’, Minnesota; Roger A. Munson*, Ohio; John J. O’Connell’, Rhode Island; Chester Phillips’, West Virginia; Irving B. Selmer’, Wyoming
Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen*, Minnesota
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Walter D. Power’, Maryland
Historian: Arnold J. Stockstad’, North Dakota
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis’, New York

61st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Houston, Texas, Aug. 17 – 23, 1979
Commander: John M. Carey’, Michigan
Hamilton Fish’, New York, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: L. Max Connoly’, Arizona; Alvin F. Grauerholz, Kansas; Joseph F. Ward’, New Jersey; John H. Wienand, Jr.*, Alabama; Nathan M. Wolfe’, South Carolina
Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen’, Minnesota
Chaplain: R. Drew Wolcott’, Mexico
Historian: Harry H. Kretzler, M.D.*, Washington
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis’, New York

62nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Boston, Mass., Aug. 15 – 21, 1980
Commander: Frank I. Hamilton*, Indiana
Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen’, Minnesota
Chaplain: Rev. Karl E. Kniseley*, California
Historian: Phillip Haddad, Oklahoma
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis’, New York

63rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Michael J. Kogutek’, New York
Vice Commanders: Ralph M. Godwin’, Mississippi; Keith H. Gwilliam’, Utah;
Matthew W. Jamieson’, Michigan; Robert W. Lowry*, Nebraska; Dr. Almo J. Sebastianelli, Pennsylvania
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. George S. Macres*, Minnesota
Historian: Neal S. Sundeen, Arizona
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

64th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Aug. 20 – 26, 1982
Commander: Jack W. Flynt*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Frank T. Markovich*, Missouri; Dan C. McDonough*, Alaska; Percy C. Miller*, Tennessee; Melvin 'Doc' Simon, Vermont; David A. Wade*, Maryland
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. George R. M. Rummey*, Virginia
Historian: Bernard J. Chisholm*, Minnesota
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

65th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Al Keller, Jr.*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Robert C. Gabrielson*, South Dakota; Margaret M. Malone*, New Jersey; H. Melvin Napier, Indiana; Jack C. Plato*, Oregon; Leo O. Walker*, Oklahoma
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John D. Kemp*, Ohio
Historian: James W. Conway*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

66th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Salt Lake City, Utah, Sept. 3 – 5, 1984
Commander: Keith Kreul, Wisconsin
Vice Commanders: J. Leslie Brown, Jr.*, Kentucky; Roberto Gonzalez-Vazquez*, Puerto Rico; Charles R. Green*, Ohio; Robert W. Groccia*, Massachusetts, John N. Lockhart*, Hawaii
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: James Clay McKee, Utah
Historian: Herberta T. Stark*, New Hampshire
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

67th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New Orleans, La., Aug. 23 – 28, 1985
Commander: Clarence M. Bacon, Maryland
Vice Commanders: Robert S. Turner, Georgia; Harold E. Collet*, Idaho; Ronald D. Birk*, Kansas; Stewart Kunde*, Minnesota; Stephen J. Mikosky*, Pennsylvania
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Historian: Roy B. Mahoney, Florida
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

68th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Cincinnati, Ohio, Aug. 29 – Sept. 4, 1986
Commander: Dale L. Renaud*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: Bernard Black, South Carolina; Norman Conn*, California; Vito M. DeFilipp*, Maine; Miles S. Epling, West Virginia, H. F. 'Sparky' Gierke*, North Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Dr. Gordon L. Patterson*, Nebraska
Historian: Ethel M. Matuschka*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

69th NATIONAL CONVENTION
San Antonio, Texas, Aug. 21 – 27, 1987
Commander: James P. Dean*, Mississippi
E. Roy Stone, Jr.*, South Carolina, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: William M. Detweiler, Louisiana; Doris R. Gross*, Washington; Donald E. Neil*, Delaware; Allen L. Titus*, Indiana; Ervin F. Van Dyke*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Arthur J. Jakobiak, New Mexico
Historian: J. Ruffin Apperson*, Virginia
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

70th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Louisville, Ky., Sept. 6 – 8, 1988
Commander: John P. 'Jake' Comer, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Neale V. Cabral*, Connecticut; Joe Frank, Jr., Missouri; W. P. 'Bill' Peterson*, Montana; Paul B. Phifer, Jr.*, Virginia; F. Leon Reed*, Arkansas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Jerry Salveson*, Minnesota
Historian: Edward F. Brennan*, Illinois
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland
71st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Baltimore, Md., Sept. 5 – 7, 1989
Commander: H.F. 'Sparky' Gierke*, North Dakota
Vice Commanders; Thomas L. Gabel*, Ohio; Harvey Holcomb*, Texas; Archie Pozzi, Jr.*, Nevada; Ray G. Smith, Sr.*, North Carolina: John P. Tipping, New York
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. F. Robert Davidson, Michigan
Historian: Richard A. Stevens, Sr.*, Louisiana
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

72nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Indianapolis, Ind., Aug. 28 - 30, 1990
Commander: Miles S. Epling, West Virginia
Vice Commanders: Vincent E. Blank*, Iowa; Joseph E. Caouette, New Hampshire; Andrew J. Cooper, Alabama; Gerald Goetzinger, South Dakota; Vinton R. Guy*, Colorado
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Lynn S. Kearsley*, Idaho
Historian: C. Carl Pilgrim*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

73rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Robert S. Turner, Georgia
Vice Commanders: Lewis Adams, Nebraska; James T. Anderson*, Wyoming; Fred M. Ingellis*, Mississippi; Harry F. McDowell*, Florida; George E. Sampson, New Jersey
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Michas M. Ohnstad, Minnesota
Historian: Harold Matthew Branton, Texas
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

74th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Chicago, Ill., Aug. 25 – 27, 1992
Commander: Dominic D. DiFrancesco, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: James 'Jim' G. Brouillette, Vermont; Thomas P. Cadmus*, Michigan; Ronald C. Murphy*, Arizona; Lawrence F. Roy, Oklahoma; Lee R. Stolfs*, Kansas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Donal M. 'Jack' Squires*, West Virginia
Historian: Bettie M. Canon*, Montana
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

75th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Pittsburgh, Pa., Sept. 3 – 9, 1993
Commander: Roger A. Munson*, Ohio
Vice Commanders: Joseph V. Adams*, Pennsylvania; Paul Andrejewski*, Minnesota; Robert E. 'Jack' David, South Carolina; John William 'Bill' Murphy*, Arkansas; Louis A. 'Tony' Santillanes, New Mexico
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. James R. Wagner, Mississippi
Historian: Delfo Barabani*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

76th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Minneapolis, Minn., Sept. 6 – 8, 1994
Commander: Bruce Thiesen, California
Vice Commanders: Juan H. Cintron*, Puerto Rico; Douglas A. Mason*, Utah; John J. Mulkern*, Massachusetts; K. W. Ohl*, Indiana; Curtis O. Twete, North Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Msgr. Raymond J. Kozlowski*, New York
Historian: Marjorie T. Simpson*, Georgia
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

77th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Indianapolis, Ind., Sept. 4 – 6, 1995
Commander: William M. Detweiler, Louisiana
Vice Commanders: Joseph T. Craig*, Alaska; Silas M. Noel, Kentucky; Calvin E. Patton*, Maryland; H. Gordon Burleigh*, New York; Vernon K. Gosenick*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Roy L. Pryor*, South Carolina
Historian: M. LaReine Maxey*, Nevada, (died 10-7-94); Succeeded by Carl S. Wipperman, Washington (appointed 10-19-94)
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland
78th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 30 – Sept. 5, 1996
Commander: Daniel A. Ludwig, Minnesota
Vice Commanders: Keith Baker, Iowa; William L. Ciciotte, Maine; Robert D. Scott, Oregon; C. Darrel Haskell, South Dakota; Ralph J. Reel*, Tennessee
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Joseph E. Reynolds*, Texas
Historian: R. Paul Tenney*, Vermont
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

79th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Orlando, Fla., Aug. 29 – Sept. 4, 1997
Commander: Joseph J. Frank, Missouri
Vice Commanders: Wilson R. Timmons*, Florida; Orland H. Taylor*, Hawaii; Roger L. Wild*, Nebraska; Albert M. Robotti*, New Jersey; Robert L. Bowen, Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Charles H. Richmond*, Oklahoma
Historian: Barbara 'Bobbe' Stuvengen*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

80th NATIONAL CONVENTION
New Orleans, La., Sept. 4 – 10, 1998
Commander: Anthony Jordan, Maine
Vice Commanders: Erwin Gus Williams, Connecticut; Conrad A. Chisholm*, Idaho; Norris W. Preston, Missouri; Gerald L. Moore*, Ohio; Robert E. Vass*, West Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Henry E. Eisenhart*, Pennsylvania
Historian: Tommy Mills*, Mississippi
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

81st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Anaheim, Calif., Sept. 3 – 9, 1999
Commander: Butch L. Miller, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Leo P. Burke*, California; Roger L. Tingerl, Georgia; James W. Gravenstein, Kansas; Fernando M. Goulart, Rhode Island; John D. Morris, Texas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Robert J. Sweeney, New York
Historian: Robert L. Klipstine*, Ohio
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr., Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

82nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 1 – 7, 2000
Commander: Alan G. Lance, Sr., Idaho
Vice Commanders: James F. Fraughnaugh*, Alabama; Milton W. Lobstein, Michigan; Robert Skallerud*, Minnesota; Robert F. Neville, New York; L. Harry Easley*, Washington
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: David R. Brown, Louisiana
Historian: Robert Mead*, Nebraska
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr., Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

83rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Ray G. Smith*, North Carolina
Vice Commanders: Charles C. Ragsdell*, Arkansas; James E. Koutz, Indiana; Henry P. Bradley, Massachusetts; John C. Pellegrini, Montana; William A. Weatherly*, South Carolina
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Calvin C. Turpin, California
Historian: James Buterbaugh, Kansas
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

84th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Charlotte, N.C., Aug. 27 – 29, 2002
Commander: Richard J. Santos, Maryland
Vice Commanders: Russell H. Hanseter, Wisconsin; Charles R. John*, Oklahoma; Terry D. Lewis, Pennsylvania; James F. Mareschal, Missouri; Dale R. Salmen*, Nevada
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: David F. Russell, Virginia
Historian: Walter L. Davis, Michigan
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

85th NATIONAL CONVENTION
St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 26 – 28, 2003
Commander: Ronald F. Conley, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: Jefferson 'Jeff' Luginbuel; Roy L. Kirkham, Louisiana; Robert M. Johnson*, Maryland; Robert G. Bourvival, New Hampshire; Donavon R. Mason, South Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Norris A. Keirn, Indiana
Historian: Donald F. Simons, Texas
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

86th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Nashville, Tenn., Aug. 31, Sept. 1, 2, 2004
Commander: John A. Brieden, III, Texas
Vice Commanders: Richard G. Denbow, Iowa; Michael Dennis Helm, Nebraska; Fang A. Wong, New York; Clinton E. Thompson, North Carolina; Todd E. White, Wyoming
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Dr. William J. P. Doubek, III, Missouri
Historian: Fae Casper, Georgia
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

87th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 23 – 25, 2005
Commander: Thomas P. Cadmus*, Michigan
Vice Commanders: Marco A. Valenzuela*, Arizona; Charles W. Barrett, Georgia; Samuel Barney*, Ohio; Wayne B. Richey, South Carolina; Linda M. Thayer, Vermont
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. James T. Akers, Kansas
Historian: W. Frazier Brinley, Connecticut
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

88th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 29 – 31, 2006
Commander: Thomas L. Bock, Colorado
Vice Commanders: Willard F. Coffey, Michigan; James H. Hall, New Jersey; Taurino J. Trevino*, New Mexico; Sebastian T. Roll*, North Dakota; Michael E. Harris, Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Steven E. Wright, Utah
Historian: Johnny B. Keel, Louisiana
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

89th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Paul A. Morin, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Bryon W. White*, Alabama; Elgin Wahlborg, Kansas; Lloyd H. Woods, Maine; Robert C. Lahiere, Tennessee; Allan C. Setterberg, Utah
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Stanley Gruneich, South Dakota
Historian: Michael J. Miskell, Pennsylvania
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana

90th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Martin F. Conatser, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Peggy G. Dettori, Alaska; Thomas L. Burns, Jr., Delaware; Randall A. Fisher, Kentucky; Donald Hayden, Minnesota; David A. Korth, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
(Voted title of Past National Commander, effective 10/16/2008)
Chaplain: Rev. Elliott L. Foss, Jr. Georgia
Historian: James M. Holmes, Indiana
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

91st NATIONAL CONVENTION
Louisville, Ky., Aug. 25 – 27, 2009
Commander: David K. Rehbein, Iowa
Vice Commanders: James A. LaCoursiere, Jr., Connecticut
Michael J. Landkamer, Nebraska
James W. Davis, West Virginia
Harley W. Ray, Oregon; Dellan 'Shorty' T. Simmons, Texas
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Rev. Lawrence 'Larry' Vollink, Michigan
Historian: Charles J. Zelinsky, Illinois
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

92nd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 30, Sept. 1, 2, 2010
Commander: Clarence E. Hill, Florida
Vice Commanders: Morris M. Bentley, Idaho, Dr. Gordon B. Browning, Maryland, Mark A. Avis, Massachusetts, James C. Morris, Ohio, Eugene Schumacher, South Dakota
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Rev. John L. Beaver, Alabama
Historian: James T. Higuera, California
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

93rd NATIONAL CONVENTION
Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 30 – Sept. 1, 2011
Commander: Jimmie L. Foster, Alaska
Vice Commanders: Russell J. Henry, Louisiana; John M. Mella, Michigan; Carlos Orria-Medina, Puerto Rico; Eugene R. Pytka, Rhode Island; William F. Schrier, Washington

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Rev. Daniel J. Seehafer, Wisconsin
Historian: James Fratolillo, Massachusetts
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

94th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Indianapolis, Ind., Aug. 28 - 30, 2012
Commander: Fang A. Wong, New York
Richard M. Pedro*, New York, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Mervin G. Gunderson, Montana; James H. Hales, Jr., Pennsylvania; Milton G. Heifner, Iowa; Larry D. Sheets, Florida; David N. Voyles, Missouri
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Gerald Theriot, Louisiana
Historian: Robert B. Craig, Nebraska
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

95th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Houston, Texas, Aug. 27 – 29, 2013
Commander: James E. Koutz, Indiana
Vice Commanders: Jeanette Rae, Nevada; John E. Neylon, New Hampshire; Glenn A. Hickman, Ohio; James H. Holland, South Carolina; David R. Hall, West Virginia
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Ronald Derrick, Idaho
Historian: N. Larry Rozier, North Carolina
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

96th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Charlotte, N. C. Aug. 26 – 28, 2014
Commander: Daniel M. Dellinger, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Douglas W. Wooddell, Colorado; Robert E. Newman, Indiana; William A. Rakestraw, Jr., New Jersey; Wayne D. Satrom, North Dakota; Paul E. Dillard, Texas
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Daniel A. McClure, Iowa
Historian: Charemon Dunham, South Dakota
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

97th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Commander: Michael D. Helm, Nebraska
Vice Commanders: Paul O. Sanford, Kansas; Douglas C. Haggen, France; Richard W. Neville, North Carolina; William R. Bryant, Virginia; Gerald L. Jacobs, Wyoming
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Tierian ‘Randy’ Cash, North Carolina
Historian: Susan B. Mason, Florida
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

98th NATIONAL CONVENTION
Cincinnati, Ohio, Aug. 30, 31, Sept. 1, 2016
Commander: Harold D. Barnett, Georgia
Vice Commanders: George E. Cushing, Arizona; Jimmy F. Lane, Arkansas; John W. Hargreaves, Maine; Alan A. Davis, Sr., Minnesota; David L. Gough, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: H. C. Ted Kelley* Pennsylvania
Historian: James E. Copher, Minnesota
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

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PROCEEDINGS

of the

98th Annual Convention

of

The American Legion

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

... At 8:30 a.m., the delegates assembled for the 98th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, although he isn’t here, I want to acknowledge a longtime friend of The American Legion. After 37 years of entertaining us, our longtime National Convention organist, Peter Olé, has earned himself a well-deserved retirement. We shall miss him. But we're pleased to have, and I want you to join me in a round of applause for this year's keyboard maestro, Rick Pedro. (Applause)

Call to Order
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The 98th Convention will come to order. Ladies and gentlemen, please rise as the National Champion Color Guard from Harrisburg Post 472, Houston, Texas, presents the Colors, and then remain standing while rendering a salute for the singing of the National Anthem by Larry Gatlin.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors, followed by which the National Anthem was performed by Larry Gatlin.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Color Guard, you may retire. Thank you. Let's give them another round of applause for the award-winning Post 472 Color Guard from Houston, Texas. (Applause)

Please uncover at this time for the invocation. I call on acting national chaplain and Past National Chaplain Randy Cash from North Carolina. Please uncover.

Invocation
Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North Carolina, Acting National Chaplain

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid. Let us pray.

Our Father, as we pause in a moment of prayer, we recognize that You are the source of all life and animation and that in You we live and move and have our very being. Almighty God, we ask Your blessings on this occasion of the 98th Annual American Legion Convention.

We thank You for the dedication of the staff and the Ohio delegation who have made this a possibility and a success. This exemplary devotion to duty, O Lord, brings to mind this morning the men and women of our Armed Forces standing watch ashore, at sea, and in the air ensuring, our peace and security.

May all who wear the cloth of our nation and their families know Your presence and peace. And now, O Lord, bless this time together and we'll give You honor, praise and glory, for I pray in Your most holy name, Amen.
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Pledge of Allegiance
Daniel L. Zimmerman, Georgia, National Sergeant-at-Arms

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Chaplain Cash. Please remain uncovered as National Sergeant-at-Arms Daniel Zimmerman of the Department Georgia leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance. ... The delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman, National Security Commission
E. C. Toppin, North Carolina, Vice Chairman, National Security Commission

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: At this time we pause to remember those who are listed as prisoner of war or missing in action from wars in which we have been engaged. We in The American Legion will never forget them. We will not ease the pressure on our government to do the right thing and continue to work for an accounting of all those missing.

I now call upon the chairman of the National Security Commission, G. Michael Schlee, of Maryland, and Vice Chairman E. C. Toppin of North Carolina to place the POW/MIA flag on the empty chair.

Preamble to The American Legion Constitution
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

Legionnaires, please join me and cover as we reaffirm our commitment to the principles and ideals on which our American Legion was founded by reciting the Preamble to the Constitution.

... The delegation recited the preamble to The American Legion Constitution.

Special Remembrance
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander


We will remember and eulogize them at a future meeting, but I would also like to say a few words about them now. A 50-year member of Glen H. Daykin Post 155 in Adrian, Michigan, Tom Cadmus was as affable and humble as they came. Whether Past National Commander Cadmus was speaking to one of his fellow workers from the Ford Motor Company or the president of the United States, his message was the same, you are important to me.

He was a blue-collar leader in a blue Legion cap, who happened to hold the highest office in The American Legion from 2004 to 2005. During his year in office, America was very divided over the war in Iraq. Tom Cadmus had one allegiance, the troops. He remembered how Vietnam veterans were not welcomed home properly and he vowed that America would never turn its back on its troops while he was in office. He led our organization as delegates unanimously passed Resolution 169, which urged all Americans to stand united in the Global War on Terrorism and united in supporting the troops that were fighting that war.

He arranged a telephone call from President George W. Bush to the convention hall, in which the president thanked the 2,000 delegates for their support of such a bold, and yes, controversial resolution. He also loved The American Legion Riders and has taken his motorcycle to the Sturgis Rally in South Dakota and the Tail of the Dragon route from North Carolina to Tennessee.
At this time, we remember the Honorable H. F. “Sparky” Gierke, who was the first Vietnam veteran to lead our organization as national commander. An experienced JAG officer for the United States Army, Commander Gierke’s brilliant legal mind was put to use when the Supreme Court ruled that Flag desecration was free speech, during Sparky’s term as our national commander. And so began our fight for the Flag Protection Amendment. During our 1989 National Convention in Baltimore, Commander Gierke said, “I would be remiss as the leader of the nation’s largest veterans organization, a group whose ranks are made up of men and women who put their lives on the line for the flag, if I did not help lead the charge for this amendment.”

Commander Gierke served with great distinction as a justice on the North Dakota Supreme Court and as a chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Services.

Tom and Sparky were friends and mentors to me. They will both be missed by many in this room, countless friends back home, and their wonderful families. Please join me in a moment of silence, for these two great American Legion national commanders, Thomas P. Cadmus and the Honorable H. F. “Sparky” Gierke.

Please remove your caps and bow your head for a moment of silence. Thank you. Please recover.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: To begin our opening ceremonies this morning, please welcome back, and, by the way, thank you for the singing of the National Anthem, a legendary country and gospel music star.

In the 1970s and '80s, his band, the Gatlin Brothers, dominated the charts, with smash hits like “All the Gold in California,” “Love is Just a Game,” “Houston (Means I’m One Day Closer to You)” and “Statues Without Hearts,” just to name a few. Along with the Oak Ridge Boys, he appeared in The American Legion Christmas Special. He is a patriot and a friend of our military and our veterans. But before calling him up here again, let’s watch this brief video about our Master of Ceremonies, Larry Gatlin.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a warm American Legion welcome to our master of ceremonies, Larry Gatlin. (Applause)

Opening Ceremony
Larry Gatlin

MR. LARRY GATLIN: I snuck up on you. Good morning. I might have already come in the wrong door, I don't know. They said come in over there. I'm grateful to be here. You know, I was in an airplane three or four years ago. I get in airplanes. Some people claim they get on them. Explain it to the folks from Wisconsin. Okay. (Laughter) Oh, I'm sorry. I mean Iowa. (Laughter) I can't win this one.

No, I was in that airplane, and I was reading a newspaper from back East which shall remain nameless. I think I'm in pretty good company. It was the New York Times. We call it the communist manifesto at our house. But anyway, I'm not running for anything. The gist of the article that morning in the New York Times was what an awful country we are and what terrible things we were doing around the world, not only now but for the little over 200 years of our existence.

And I'm going to be honest with you, the more I read, the madder I got. I just was sitting there steaming because I knew better. And all of a sudden I remembered something that my old big buddy, my big brother, Johnny Cash, told me one time. He said, "Pilgrim," that's what he used to call me, he said, "Something makes you mad enough, boy, you'd dad-burned sure write a song about it." He didn't say "dad-burned" either. So, J.R., I wrote a song about it for these nice people.

... At this time, Larry Gatlin performed a musical interlude. (Cheers and applause)
Thank you, and good morning. I'm really glad to be here. I'd forgotten about that little video that I made. I made it about six or eight weeks ago. How many of you gentlemen are over 50? (Laughter) How many of you have found out that there are certain things that, well, as you get older, certain things you can't, well, uh, not that one. (Laughter)

My memory. See, my wife buys me those Gingko Biloba vitamins and I keep forgetting to take them. That's just what happens. I had forgotten really that a lot of the things that I had said on that little video is what I want to talk to you about today.

I am honored to be here with all of you warriors. (Applause) And your husbands. (Applause) I mean that.

I met these six young people backstage. If we had about a thousand of them, we could fix everything that's wrong in the whole world today. (Applause) I don't think we need a thousand. I think we could take these six right here and pretty well accomplish that.

But I am honored to be here this morning. The first four words of your preamble, For God and country, that's pretty much all I need to hear about any human being, all that I need to know when you're talking about America. My mom and dad raised brother Steve and brother Rudy. You're going to see them tonight. We're doing a concert for you tonight. Brother Steve and Rudy will be here. (Applause)

Yeah, you all are old enough to know the Gatlin Brothers. Go ahead and clap. (Applause) I know Steve will be here. Rudy, Rudy had a little trouble yesterday. Well, he got thrown in jail. (Laughter) He didn't do anything real bad. I'll tell you about that in a little bit.

But we were raised in a little Pentecostal church out in west Texas, and we were raised to know the difference between right and wrong. We didn't always do it. But we knew what it was. So for God and country and family, that means something to the Gatlin Brothers. Let me get the deal about Rudy right away. Here's what happened.

Rudy is a great golfer. Rudy is by far the best golfer of the three of us. In fact, Rudy is the number one ranked amateur, singer, entertainer golfer in the world. I'm serious. He's ranked by Golf Digest. My baby brother Rudy can hit a golf ball farther than my momma and daddy went on their honeymoon. (Laughter) I'm serious, he can really do it.

So, what happened was he was in Dallas, Texas, practicing his chipping and putting because sometimes his short game is a little lacking. So he was out at Royal Oaks Golf Club working on his chipping and putting. And he looked down at his watch and it was 7:30, and he realized he was supposed to have been home at 6:30. He knew he was in deep yogurt. Know what I mean?

So he threw his golf clubs in the back of his little pickup truck and took off down the North Dallas Tollway. Unfortunately for my baby brother, he was clocked doing 86 miles an hour in a 35-mile construction zone. I don't know about Wisconsin, but it ain't good in Texas to do that. So that was his first mistake. His second mistake was he decided he did not have time to stop and get a ticket. (Laughter)

So he just kept going. So he just had it up to 86, 96, looking in the rear. Finally, 112 miles an hour on the North Dallas Tollway. That state trooper, whoop, whoop, right behind him. Rudy kept looking in the rearview mirror thinking he could outrun him. And finally he couldn't outrun him, so he pulled over to the side of the road to get the ticket, take his medicine, get on home.

He knew he was in trouble right away because that state trooper was a big old boy. He was about 6-foot-12. And that's almost 7-feet for you folks from Iowa. We picked on Wisconsin enough, all right? (Laughter)

So he was a big old boy. And he walked on up there to Rudy. And he was chewing gum, and he was wearing a big old pair of those yellow Rod Steiger "In the Heat of the Night" glasses. Y'all remember Sheriff Gillespie? Remember?

He walked up and looked down there at my baby brother in that car, and he said, "Boy, you're in a mess of trouble unless you, you know, tell me some story I ain't never heard before as to why you was driving that dad-burned fast."
Brother Rudy looked up at him and said, "Well, officer, two weeks ago my wife ran off with a state trooper in a car just like that and I thought you was him trying to bring her back." *(Laughter)*

So yesterday afternoon they put him in jail. I think we got him out of jail. But brother Steve, I think he's going to be here. Brother Steve is going to be here.

And I talked to you about being a member of the Assembly of God church, Pentecostal church where we learned right from wrong. Like I say, we didn't always do it. But brother Steve has had a little change. See, we were Pentecostal kids. He told me that he has recently changed religions. Now, I know we don't talk about religions. We talk about God, for God and country, as you understand that concept.

Brother Steve told me he has recently changed religions. Because we were Pentecostal kids. Then he said he moved up to Baptist. And then he said, now he said, he is all the way up to Presbyterian. All the way up.

And he told me. Last week he said, "Big brother," he said, "I figured out something. I've been a Presbyterian two weeks, but I figured out there's a big difference between Baptist and Presbyterian." I said, "What is that?" He said, "Well, unlike the Baptists, the Presbyterian will at least say hello to you in the liquor store." *(Laughter)*

Baptists won't do it, young people. Isn't that right, chaplain? If a Baptist says anything to you in a liquor store, it's something like: You didn't see me in here. *(Laughter)*

When I speak, I kind of speak extemporaneously off the top of my head. But some folks here lately who have gone off prompter have gotten themselves in trouble. You know what I'm saying? So I wrote down some things that I want you to hear, because I am really glad to be here. So I'm going to read a little of it.

First of all, I bring greetings to you from a China Marine, Corporal Curly Gatlin, 1st Marine Division, 3rd Amphib Corps, Tianjin, China, 1945. I bring a Semper Fi to all of you Marines, a hardy handshake and a pat on the back to all you soldiers, sailors, airmen, National Guardsmen and Coast Guardsmen, and thanks from my father, my Marine father.

So hear this: My father is not a former Marine or an ex-Marine. My father is just an 89-year-old Marine not currently on active duty, and he is locked and loaded and ready to rock. Hoorah!

After the war, my father brought his Marine uniform home, and he wore it when he married my mother. My 88-year-old mom sends her greetings, too, by the way. *(Applause)*

A year and a half later I was born. When I was a toddler, I wore my daddy's jacket around our little trailer house until the bottom hem wore off. As I grew into manhood, as our career took off, when I started making enough money singing my little homemade songs about doggies and horsies all across this great country, the country you brave men and women have saved time and time again, when I started making enough money to have my own clothes tailor made, I designed them myself to look like my daddy's old mean, green Marine uniform.

Please understand that I know that I have not earned the right to wear my daddy's uniform. Or any of your uniforms. Because, you see, I'm not a veteran of our armed services. I was No. 296 in the draft lottery during Vietnam. So I was not drafted. I did not have to go. Some of you did.

You men and women who served in Vietnam, I humbly ask you to stand up right now and let me and these other great Americans welcome you home, the homecoming that you never got and that you deserve! *(Applause)*

I have friends on the wall. My baseball PONY League catcher, Rex Young, and missing in action, Ronnie Forrester. So I appreciate you very much.

So back to my wardrobe. You folks probably never thought we'd be up here talking about my wardrobe today, huh? But just hang with me. As I said, I do not deserve to wear one of your uniforms or an exact copy of one of your uniforms. So I changed it up a little bit.
First, I didn't put that waist belt on the jacket like the one my daddy's jacket had. With my little 68-year-old belly, it wouldn't look too good. You know, I'm like that old boy. He said: Well, I used to wear 32 regulars; now I wear pull-down 32s. That's kind of what a pull-down 32 looks like. Second, some of you are laughing, but they're like 34s and 36 pull-downs, huh? I did not make it out of the mean green Marine material or any other exact color of your uniforms.

I did not use the buttons or emblems or insignia of your uniforms. As I said before, I have not earned that right. The buttons on my jacket are the American eagle, the symbol of this great country. May I show it to you? If my assistant will come up here, please. Come right up here, assistant. This is my beautiful wife of 47 years, Janice Gatlin. (Applause)

I knew I'd start bawling. By the way, this beautiful lady is the recipient of the 1964 American Legion Outstanding Student Award from Ector High School in Odessa, Texas. Show that. (Applause)

JANICE GATLIN: It was my great honor to receive this American Legion Outstanding Student Award in 1964 from Ector High School in Odessa, Texas. Little did I know then that 52 years later I would be able to stand in front of you today and personally thank you for this award. Thank you from the bottom of my heart and thank you for your service to this great nation. God bless you all. (Applause)

LARRY GATLIN: So there's my jacket. (Applause)

Want to hold it there for a second? It's kind of pretty. I had this jacket made by God-fearing Americans in Bremen by-God Georgia at the Sewell Clothing Company, an American company that has been making uniforms for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines of the United by-God States of America since 1916. And when I invoke the name of Almighty God, I invoke it in honor of His power, in honor of His glory, in honor of His might and His providence and in praise to Him for all of you and for this wonderful United by-God States of America. That's how the Gatlins do about it. (Applause)

Right after I had this jacket made, I wore it a few times. And even though in my heart I knew that I was wearing it out of respect for my Marine daddy and out of respect for each of you, I always felt a little awkward about it for fear that someone might take it the wrong way.

So I asked for some advice. I brought it with me to a charity fundraiser in Washington, D.C., a couple years ago where I asked an old friend of mine about wearing it. I told my friend the story about my Marine daddy. About me wearing it around our trailer house when I was just a toddler. And that, while I had not served in the military, I had tried in my own way to serve in my own way by going all over the known world, in parts of fill in the blank of your own state, Wisconsin, Iowa, wherever with the USO, with the United States Air Force Band from Japan to Okinawa.

Let me tell you about Okinawa. We were there one day. I took my dad with me on the USO Tour. He was backstage. I saw a young Marine down there. He didn't look like he was shaving. He looked like he was about 13.

And I said, "Marine!" He said, "Yes, sir!" I said, "How long was your boot camp?" He said, "18 weeks, sir!" I said, "You're the luckiest human being on Okinawa. Mine was 18 years." (Laughter)

We had boot camp every morning, boys and girls. Please believe me. And I'm grateful for it. I really am.

So from Okinawa to Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany, to Kuwait, Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary. I even had the opportunity on Christmas morning to sing up the ladder of a guard tower to a soldier on duty guarding the Serbia-Macedonia border during the Bosnian War. I've been to Saudi Arabia, Somalia, to mobile surgical field hospitals, and I've been to Walter Reed.

To any other place in the world, I could go, to go sing for and visit with the men and women in the service of our great country. And that it was my hope, I told this friend of mine in D.C., that he would give me his permission and his blessing to wear the jacket
whenever I thought it appropriate, and in so doing honor my father and the veterans and active-duty soldiers, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen and National Guardsmen of America.

It was then that my friend, General Colin Powell, said: Corporal Gatlin, I order you to wear that jacket whenever you think it's appropriate. Keep singing, keep your powder dry, never leave a comrade behind and never surrender. I think I should follow General Powell's orders, don't you all? (Applause)

It's the same General Colin Powell who once remarked: The military forces of the United States of America have freed more people from tyranny than any other country and any other military force in the history of the world, and all we have ever asked of them is enough dirt to bury our dead.

We never went in conquest of other people. We only buried our dead as we freed them. Give General Powell a hand. He's a wonderful American, and I love and respect him. (Applause)

All right, button it up, Marine. That's what Daddy used to say. This hairdo isn't exactly high and tight like he'd have it. (Laughter) But it was for the first 21 years of my life while I lived under his rule. (Laughter) Getting a little shaggy there, boy.

On August 6, 1945, my father along with 1,500 other Marines were cramped onto the troopship \textit{Wakefield} cruising towards Japan at the exact moment when Colonel Paul Tibbets and the crew of a B-29, Enola Gay, dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan.

Three days later, on August 9, Major Charles W. Sweeney and his crew dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. On September 2, General Douglas MacArthur accepted the unconditional surrender of the Empire of Japan aboard the battleship \textit{Missouri} in Tokyo Bay. You know all that.

What you might not know, my friends, is what happened on August 6 and August 9, 1945, as horrible as it was, if it had not happened, I probably would not be standing here in front of you today in my scaled-down version of my father's Marine jacket. And I can say with at least some certainty that if President "Give 'Em Hell" Harry Truman had not had the, uh, fill in the blank, Iowa. (Laughter) Let's just call them the big brassies, okay, that's what we call them in Texas, to do what needed to be done, what had to be done, some of you would not be here today either. And as horrible as August 6 and August 9 were, there are hundreds of thousands of other Americans and hundreds of thousands of our good Japanese citizens, now some of our best allies, who wouldn't be alive today either.

So when some wussified, wet-behind-the-ears co-ed at Berkeley or even a pseudo-Longhorn at my beloved University of Texas proclaims that we should not use the power of our military to utterly destroy our avowed enemies, whoever or wherever they may be; when they say all-out war against those who would if they could totally destroy our American way of life and that the boots that the American people have supplied to the men and women of our military should only be worn to conduct military exercises and to wear in parades and should not be the boots on the ground of whatever battlefield on this planet that needs to be cleared of the enemy of the United States of America, because that's not who we are as Americans, I say: Bull! (Cheers and applause) Fill in the blanks, Iowa.

I say: Bovine droppings! Bovine droppings, that's what it is. Winning America's wars and killing America's enemies is what we are about, what you men and women are about.

Please understand me/ I'm not advocating we start a nuclear war. What I'm advocating is that whenever and wherever war is declared on America by whomever, the president of the United States, the commander-in-chief of the greatest fighting force the world has ever known, should, with the counsel of the greatest generals and greatest military minds in the world, formulate, plan, initiate and conduct whatever military operations are needed to assure the complete annihilation of the enemy in the shortest amount of time while carefully, prayerfully considering the loss of life to our warriors and to the poor, unfortunate souls, many of them innocent bystanders who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.
What I am advocating, what I'm hoping and praying for, is a commander-in-chief, a man or woman, who will stand in the well of the House of Representatives or in the Oval Office on national TV or worldwide TV, or at home plate at Yankee Stadium or in the cornfield in Iowa, or on the 50-yard line of Darrell K. Royal Memorial Longhorn Stadium in Austin, or behind the podium of next year's National Convention of the American Legion on August 18 in Reno, Nevada, and pledge to the American people and warn any and all would-be aggressors who threaten America that, as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said on December 8, 1941, “Hostilities exist. There is no blinking to the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger, and that the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory with confidence in our Armed Forces, with the unbounding determination of our people. We will gain the inevitable triumph, so help us, God!” (Cheers and applause)

And if they will let an old, gray, bearded, 68-year-old geezer go with them, I'll put on whatever uniform I'm issued, go with our fighting force and do whatever I can to see that that is exactly what happens. The inevitable triumph of the United States of America, so help me, God. For God and country. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

Thank you all. God bless you. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. (Applause)

You're very kind. That Marine daddy of mine never made more than $30,000 a year in his life. And his kids have worked hard. And by God's grace we've had a lot of great breaks. And we're one-percenters now, those dreaded one-percenters. But it's because of men and women like you and those sitting behind me and all around the world that that is possible for us. So God bless you all.

I have one more thing I'm supposed to say. These kids back here, these are some of the most impressive young people I've ever seen. They act more like adults than some adults, and some of them are running for office, the ones who ain't acting. Don't get me started.

One of the reasons that The American Legion is important to me is because of the mission that we take on to mentor and to teach the young people of America about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship through our youth programs. We want to introduce you to a group of young people who epitomize the future of this great country, your American Legion Youth Champions! I met them, and they are great Americans. Please give them a hand. (Applause)

The American Legion Youth Champions

ANNOUNCER: This year's American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain hails from Belmont, Vermont. He is currently a sophomore at the University of Vermont, in Burlington, and dreams one day to become a civil environment engineer. He is currently interning at OMYA, a Calcium Carbonate company. Sponsored by Post 50 in Castleton, Vermont, please welcome your 2015 All-Academic Team Captain, Joshua Wasilewski. (Applause)

2015 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain
Joshua Wasilewski, Belmont, Vermont

Good morning. We'd like to take this moment to thank National Commander Barnett, Sons National Commander Collier, Auxiliary President Conatser, the Vermont Legion department and the entire American Legion Family for having us.

As Youth Champions, it's with great honor that we stand here before such an accomplished crowd of individuals who have tirelessly worked to preserve the freedom we sometimes forget to cherish. While preparing for this convention, we were constantly referenced as distinguished guests. But in reality, all of those in the audience are truly the
distinguished men and women who have served this country with bravery, charity, selflessness and sacrifice.

You are all the individuals who have put the well-being of others before your own, and for that we will forever be grateful. We are proud to have interacted with you, true American heroes who have served for God and for this beautiful country. We realized again that this country, where we are free to achieve our goals, would cease to exist without your tenacious work.

When I received notice that I was named the All-Academic Captain of the United States, a sense of pride and humility ran through my body. Baseball has always been a major part of my life. Frankly, I blame my parents. (Laughter)

Seriously, I couldn't be more thankful for my mom, who I know is proudly watching down on me, and dad, for their introduction to the game and their unflagging love and support in all that I do. American Legion baseball has given me more than just something to do. It's allowed me to make inseparable bonds with teammates and coaches that will last a lifetime.

During those sweltering summer days I always felt compelled to perform at my highest ability. The fundamentals and basic principles taught to us by my coaches were so routinely practiced that it felt like second nature during games. And the best thing was, win or lose, during post-game talks, my teammates and I were always greeted with new aspects of the game to concentrate on as a way to prepare for the next challenges that awaited.

Playing American Legion baseball has made for some of the best summers because it has taught me respect and enhanced my leadership qualities. For baseball, when the game is on the line, you either have the ability to simply be another player or step up for the overall well-being of the team. I realized that it is necessary to take a gamble whether I prevail or not. But in the end, knowing I did not stand idly by, is what makes a difference.

These ideas absorbed during Legion ball are exactly the same principles that must be applied to the real world. Although it is hard to believe that there's a world outside of baseball, there actually is. If these same qualities can be applied, I believe that myself and others will not act as bystanders, but rather as deciding factors in the outcome of real-world situations. This program has taught me to accept failure, to recognize what led to my mistakes, and from there to only work toward bettering myself and the others around me.

Finally, I want to show my gratitude for the monetary award that came along with this prestigious honor. It was something I did not expect to receive, but it has supported my ability to attend a university where I can pursue my academic and social dreams without having to be burdened by student debt.

As a college student, I am blessed where I can be in a learning environment and still continue my passion to play baseball while traveling all around New England, as well as join a fraternity where I'm able to pursue my desire to serve my community through philanthropy. As a member we have been able to raise thousands of dollars for United Service Organizations, our main philanthropy.

The American Legion has taught me that there are members of society who are less fortunate than myself, and that it is my civic duty to care and serve these individuals, especially the ones who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. This scholarship has also offered me the opportunity to grow my professional career. With the education that I so greatly treasure, I was fortunate to land an internship at the end of my freshman year at college. There is nothing more satisfying than being afforded the ability to receive firsthand experience about the career field that I am pursuing.

These are opportunities that would not be possible without the assistance of The American Legion. And for that I could not be more thankful to know that I am supported by such generous men and women. The American Legion has offered me a foundation through baseball, Boys State and various social events. And with that I promise to make it my mission to keep serving both God and our beautiful country.

Thank you once again for having me and God bless. (Applause)
ANNOUNCER: Our next Youth Champion was elected as President of Boys Nation by his peers. He hails from Springfield, Tennessee, and he's a member of the National Honor Society, as well as an accomplished classically trained vocalist and pianist. In addition to his musical gifts, he also won the Robert Horton Campbell award for best prosecutor in the state at the state mock trial competition. He plans to attend Eastman Conservatory of Music pursuing a degree in classical vocal performance. Please welcome your 2016 Boys Nation President, Anighya Crocker. (Applause)

2016 Boys Nation President
Anighya Crocker, Springfield, Tennessee

Good morning. Oh, I'm from Tennessee. Y'all are going to have to be louder than that. Good morning! There we go. I'm glad to be here this morning, and I'm especially glad to be here in front of such a wonderful group of people.

Being from Tennessee, as I'm sure Mr. Gatlin, since he lives in Nashville, can attest, you hear a lot of stories. Stories about how you should live, stories about what's right and what's wrong, and those stories really shape us as individuals. So today I'm going to take this opportunity to tell you all a personal favorite of mine.

This is the story of the old man and the blackbird. As the story would go, somewhere in the hills of East Tennessee, there was said to live a wise man, a man that knew all, both past and present. Omnipotence was his. His great ability gained him much notoriety throughout the land. People would come from far and wide to hear what he had to say, and it wasn't long before the word of his prophecies reached Knoxville.

In Knoxville, two university students decided they would go find the old man. Once they found him, they wouldn't ask him about his prophecies. They would try to prove him wrong. So the first university student says: I'm going to get a blackbird. I'm going to take it to him. And I'm going to ask him, Oh, wise man, is this bird alive or dead?

And if he says the bird's dead, I'll open my hands and the bird will fly away. And if he said that the bird is alive, I'll crush it and kill it.

So the two men get a blackbird and head up the trail. It's not long before they find the wise man sitting on his porch. They say, "Good morning, sir," and he says good morning back.

"Wise man, do you know where we're from?"
He goes, "Yes, son, the two of you are from Knoxville. You are at the university."
"Very good, sir. Wise man, can you tell me what's in my hand?"
The wise man says, "Son, that's a blackbird."
And he goes, "Wise man, tell us," the two students shoot each other a look, knowing they're about to prove him wrong, "Is this bird alive or dead?"

The wise man simply sits back and says: "Son, I don't know. It's in your hands." (Laughter and applause)

Now, as folky and as Tennessee as that story is, and it's a very Tennessee story, it has real application. You see, that blackbird is not just a framing device in the allegory. That blackbird is something real, something potent. That blackbird is the future of this nation. The future that us, the youth, hold, waiting for a wise man to tell us that it's in our own hands.

Many tell us what the future will be. They say this is what it will become. But it's in our hands. It's our decisions that shape the future. So where is that voice? Where is that advocate for the future? I'm telling you now that I'm looking into the face of the greatest advocate for the future of this nation, and that is The American Legion. (Applause)

You all served this nation to come back and serve the youth, to make something of us so that we can understand the value of being an American. Something that's lost in today's society. You know, I hear the old-timers, they worry. They worry about us and they worry
about my peers. But, ladies and gentlemen, I owe it to you, my generation owes it to you to say: I swear to you as long as I live I will be proud to be an American. (Applause)

And I'll be proud to be an American because my father is proud to be an American, and his father. And men and women have laid down their life for me to say I am proud to be an American. And that is something that I will never trivialize. You see, ladies and gentlemen, you all have done so much for us. The scholarship that I received will help me immensely. But what matters to me most and what will shape me and be what I recall back to is the memory and the knowledge and the ability and the service you all have given to me.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I go, I want to make a promise to you all. That is, as long as there is breath in my lungs and a heartbeat in my chest, I will proclaim my love for this nation and fight for its security. Because I owe it to you all, because you have given me the chance to shape the future that we all want to see. Thank you. (Applause)

I just want to say thank you again for giving me this opportunity. Thank you for letting me be here with you today. I love you all. God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.

ANNOUNCER: The 2016 Eagle Scout of the Year is from Cottage Grove, Wisconsin. For his Eagle Scout project, this young man folded and personally distributed 3,000 pocket U.S. flags to military personnel at deployment ceremonies. He also participated in The American Legion Oratorical Contest and attended Department of Wisconsin’s Boys State program. He plans to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. Sponsored by the Gavin-Struckmeyer Post 248, please welcome Eagle Scout of the Year, Jacob Kelly. (Applause)

2016 Eagle Scout of the Year
Jacob Kelly, Cottage Grove, Wisconsin

Good morning. It is a truly humbling experience to stand here today as your 2016 Eagle Scout of the Year. My Eagle Scout project was very near and dear to my heart. It wasn't just my Eagle Scout project. It really took on a life of its own. I still hear from those veterans five years later who received the pocket flag, and they tell me how much it meant to them.

Including scouting, I've been blessed to have been involved in many of The American Legion-sponsored programs over the years, including the Oratorical and Boys State. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many American Legion members who volunteered their time and talents in these programs. Your support and mentorship has been invaluable to not only myself, but to so many of our nation's youth.

First and foremost, I would like to recognize my mother and father. My father, unfortunately, was unable to be here, but as an American Legion member and post commander of my hometown, I wanted him to be recognized. (Applause)

I would also like to recognize the many American Legion and other organizations who supported me and mentored me over the years. Cottage Grove Boys Scout Troop 145, St. John's Northwestern Military Academy Troop 84, American Legion Post 248, District 3, and the Department of Wisconsin and The American Legion as a whole. I personally would like to thank all of you for what you have done for the community, our veterans, and our country. I am proud to be part of The American Legion as a member of the Sons of The American Legion Squadron 385.

Finally, I would like to thank the United States Military Academy at West Point for supporting my attendance here today. Again, thank you for all your support. I'm proud to represent the great state of Wisconsin, The American Legion, and our Boy Scouts of America. God bless all of you, Godspectrum, and God bless America. Go Army. Beat Navy. (Applause)
ANNOUNCER: In competition at Colorado Springs a few weeks ago, two Youth Champions took top prize in the 26th Junior Air Rifle Championships. Taylor Gibson from Salem, Oregon, claimed the Precision Champion title with an overall score of 2,476.7 out of a possible 2,509. She also set the Legion national record with a Precision final score of 104.7. She shoots for the Colonel Allison Junior Rifle Club. Please welcome our 2016 Precision Champion, Taylor Gibson.

2016 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion
Taylor Gibson, Salem, Oregon

Good morning. Again, I'd like to start off by thanking The American Legion, the Sons of The American Legion, and the Auxiliary, along with the national commander, Dale Barnett, the commander of the Sons, Kevin Collier, and the president of the Auxiliary, Sharon Conatser. All of you have been big support along my journey, along with Mr. Shayne Abrahams, for helping me come here so I can speak to all of you today.

Many times, when guys learn that I competitively shoot, they like to ask if I shoot like a girl. I like to reply with, "Yes, of course I do." You see, shooting isn't about gender, race, religion, age. None of that really matters. Standing here before you, I represent every other junior precision shooter in the nation. Someday I will represent my entire country when I stand at the top of the Olympic podium listening to our National Anthem. (Applause)

It is always important to have goals in mind, and that is my ultimate goal. The generous scholarship granted to me will aid me in college where I may continue to grow and improve my skills and get closer to that goal. This competition has taught me just how rigorous it will be to make this dream of mine come true, but I'm willing to put in the hard work it will take to get there.

There will be rocks in my path, but I will in the end overcome them. There will be bumps in the road, and while they may slow me down, they certainly will not stop me. I know I have big dreams, and with big dreams comes big setbacks. But that is perfectly okay because my dream is what keeps me moving forward. I've been told by many others that I'd never make it to where I am now. They said I would never be good enough or that I was too young and inexperienced. But because of The American Legion, the Sons, the Auxiliary, and all of you who have supported me every step of the way, I can proudly tell them that they were wrong. Your support got me where I am today. (Applause)

You have created endless opportunities for not only me, but families and children all over America. Opportunities that opened new doors to our futures. Opportunities to show the world what we are all about and the amazing things we can do. Opportunities to fulfill our dreams, no matter how big, and reach for the stars because not even the sky can limit us. You give us the tools and motivation to do our best, and we thank you. So remember that, when I stand here today, I'm standing for the kids like me, but when I stand on top of that podium, I will proudly be standing for you and all of the wonderful people on the stage with me. Thank you and God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: In the Sporter category, the championship was captured by a young shooter representing Freeport High School NJROTC in Freeport, Illinois. She won the title by firing a new Legion record of 2,365.1 out of a possible 2,400. Winning by 25 points, please welcome our 2016 Sporter Shooting Champion, Emma Thompson. (Applause)

2016 Junior Shooting Sports Sporter Champion
Emma Thompson, Freeport, Illinois

Good morning. I'd like to thank The American Legion, the Sons of The American Legion, and The American Legion Auxiliary, the Department of Illinois, and American
Legion Post 139 for providing such an amazing experience to us and other kids all across the country. I'd also like to thank my wonderful mother and father who have supported and encouraged me throughout my life and without whom I wouldn't be here today. Thank you, all of you, for being here for me and for helping me become someone that I hope you can be proud of.

As a part of my high school's NJROTC unit, I'm given a lot of responsibility. I am the current supply officer for our staff. As being a member of the staff, it has been very rewarding. Learning how to work together as a team and be a family is something that never ceases to amaze me. Learning how to work together as a unit, we share the same goal: To help our community and our country in any way we can and be the best American citizens we can be.

After high school, I hope to get accepted into the University of Illinois' NROTC program. I will use the very generous scholarship money to help pay for my education as an aerospace engineer before becoming a member of the United States Navy. (Applause)

Throughout my life, I have looked up to the American military. I have a very strong respect for the men and women overseas in our Armed Forces. As I've grown up, I've learned the importance of defending American ideals and freedom throughout the world. I've learned how important it is to stand side by side, no matter who you are, where you come from, or where you're going. We as American citizens share a love for our country that cannot be broken by the differences we see in each other. We stand as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Thank you. (Applause)

Thank you to all of the past and present members of the United States military. Thank you for serving and for dedicating your life to this beautiful country. Thank you for inspiring others to follow in your footsteps. I would like to especially thank those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, representing our nation on the front lines.

The heart of America is within its people, and you have proven that this heart is pure and strong and invincible. The six people on this stage represent our future, and I promise you that the future of this nation carries the same passion in its heart as the generations before it. We thank you for everything you've given to us, the experience, the knowledge, and the pleasure of meeting all of you. I will never forget the memories, and I will remember what The American Legion stands for.

Thank you for everything you do. I pray this is not the last time you see a shooter from Freeport High School standing in front of you. God bless you. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next Youth Champion hails from Burlington, Washington. He displayed poise and effectiveness in delivering his prepared oration entitled "Constitutional Literacy." He's a cadet chief petty officer in his local Navy JROTC and attained the rank of Eagle Scout one week after his 13th birthday. He enjoys studying the Constitution, case law, and Supreme Court decisions, and although he's only in 10th grade, he plans for a future in constitutional law. Sponsored by Washington Post 91, please welcome your 2016 National Oratorical Contest winner, Benjamin Crosby. (Applause)

2016 National Oratorical Contest First Place Winner
Benjamin Crosby, Burlington, Washington

John F. Kennedy once said, "As we extend our appreciation, we must always remember that the highest form of gratitude is not to utter words, but to live by them." Today the six of us stand here, and we thank you. We thank you for the opportunity, which you have given to each of us, but we must always remember that this is not simply an opportunity, but what you have given to us, we take and have as a solemn and grave sense of duty and obligation.

You see, I understand that, as we look at our nation today, as we observe the crime, the political divides, the inequality, the injustice, it's easy for us to lose hope. It's easy for
us to think that my generation and future generations will fail to carry on the legacy that you have left for us. It's easy to forget what it means to be American. But I'm here to tell you today that some of us have not been forgotten. Some of us will not allow the legacy that you have forged to dull and vanish with time, and some of us have not lost hope.

You see, each of us realizes, each of us understands, that we hold a solemn duty to the youth of this nation. It's a duty which we take very seriously. You see, because of the opportunity that The American Legion has given to me, because of the gifts of the programs which I have participated in, I hold an advantage over many of the youth in our nation today. Because of The American Legion Family, I am armed. I am armed with the knowledge that the greatness of this nation will never be determined by the scores of promises that politicians make. That the greatness of this nation will never be determined by the hundreds of medals our Olympic athletes bring home, but that the greatness of our nation will be determined by our reliance on 7,591 words in our nation's founding document. (Applause)

And that duty and that obligation stems from a sense of desperation. You see, in our nation today, whether they're armed or not, the young people in this country are watching. They are watching as we choose a leader for our nation. They are watching as our congressional representatives debate religious and racial inequality on the congressional floor. And they are watching as our military men and women go overseas and give up their own rights so that ours can be protected.

So when people today say that ours is a lost generation, I understand. Participating in a constitutional oratorical contest has shown me the truth and the gravity of these predictions. But that's why it's so important for me, that's why it's so important for the six of us, and that's why it's so important for every young American to stand up and say, you know what, America may someday fall away from what makes this nation great, but it sure won't be on our watch. (Applause)

I've got to be honest with you. As I stand here today, I'm absolutely floored. I'm absolutely honored because I stand here before you today in a suit and tie, in an air-conditioned room in Cincinnati, Ohio. But the only reason that I have the right and the ability to do that is because somewhere in the world there was nobody wearing combat boots, a helmet, and a rifle. Someone standing in the sweltering sun or the freezing cold. A family hanging a blue or gold star in their window. Somewhere there was a man or woman who stood up for me in Yorktown, in Gettysburg, in Normandy, in Vietnam, or in Afghanistan, and it is to these American heroes that we extend our deepest gratitude. (Applause)

The American Legion Family has given each of us, has given me, something that we can never pay back, but we accept what you have given not only as an opportunity, but as that grave and as that serious duty. We understand the duty that we have to the people of this nation. We understand the duty that we have to the youth of this nation.

It is because of those heroes and because of that sense of duty that I pledge to you here today that I will strive to live by the values of The American Legion Family for all my life so that at the end of my days I may stand up and confidently ask: Did I earn it? Did I do enough to pay back that insurmountable gift which you gave to me? Every person in this room has lived by certain words. You lived by the words "sacrifice," "protect," and "serve." And I hope that in my life I may do the same.

Thank you all for your service, thank you for your gift, and thank you for the gift and this opportunity and this duty which you bestowed on us, and it is one that we do not take lightly. God bless each of you and God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, your 2016 American Legion Youth Champions (Applause)
Presentation of the Spirit of Service Awards
General Joseph F. Dunford, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Hershel W. ‘Woody’ Williams, Medal of Honor Recipient

ANNOUNCER: Our next awards exemplify all that you as Legionnaires do throughout the year. The Spirit of Service Awards are given to men and women on active duty for their contributions to their communities and fellow citizens above and beyond the call. Assisting National Commander Barnett in presenting the awards is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps General Joseph F. Dunford and Medal of Honor Recipient and Iwo Jima veteran Hershel “Woody” Williams. Please rise as the commander leads us in rendering appropriate honors to Mr. Williams. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Hand Salute! Two! (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our first Spirit of Service Award recipient has a volunteer’s heart. He serves as the Fort Wainwright installation coordinator for the Soldiers Against Drunk Driving Program, and has helped raise the volunteer base from two to 25. He has involved himself with the American Red Cross in Alaska and the Fairbanks chapter of Big Brothers, Big Sisters, serving as a mentor and friend to a nine-year-old boy. He also spends time volunteering as soccer coach at the Fort Wainwright Youth Center and participates in the Veterans Day reading at the local elementary school. Representing the United States Army, please welcome your Spirit of Service Award recipient, Corporal Bryce T. Wolford.

CORPORAL BRYCE T. WOLFORD: Hello and good morning, everyone. It is a great honor to be in the room with so many people who share one of my core values, which is patriotism. I believe it is not a cliché to say that the United States is the greatest nation in the world. This country was founded on the backs of those who didn't ask what was in it for them, rather what they could give to make our country great for everyone else.

Maintaining that spirit of patriotism is why I have chosen to volunteer. Giving of yourself selflessly provides more than a person may realize. You are presenting yourself as an example to those around you. I have experienced this in my own volunteer journey as people will pitch in and lend a helping hand even just for a few hours, just to help out with a good cause. This encourages kindness and service in others, leading to stronger communities and building on the patriotic values of the human spirit rather than profit and self-gain. These are the communities that contribute to keeping our nation great and so strong and remind us to appreciate the luxuries we now enjoy because of patriotic giving of all of you and all of those who have come before us.

Every day that I put on my uniform, I am reminded of all the values that I was taught as a child by my wonderful parents, integrity, hard work, discipline, and respect. Anyone who carries these values understands the wonderful gift it is to volunteer and pay forward the acts of kindness and service that we have all received and taken part of.

Hebrews 10:24 states, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." While you may not always be recognized for the works achieved, never forget those who give so selflessly for us to be able to live in a country as great as ours. Thank you for this great honor. I am truly humbled to be here and to be receiving this award.

I would like to dedicate this award to my wife Jessica, who has stood beside me since the very beginning and who has helped me to get involved and be stepping out of my comfort zone and to always volunteer. And she's given of herself tirelessly and selflessly as well. Thank you all for paving the way forward and making it possible for me to be the man that I am today. Duty, honor, and country. Thank you. (Applause)
ANNOUNCER: Our next recipient of the 2016 American Legion Spirit of Service Award displays outstanding leadership and a devotion to aid others. She provides mentorship and guidance while serving as a youth volleyball coach, and volunteers at a local elementary school, practicing English with the local Japanese youth. As president of the Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions, she has helped organize numerous festivals, donations, and community events. Please welcome United States Navy Petty Officer Second Class Levetina King. (Applause)

PETTY OFFICER SECOND CLASS LEVETINA S. KING: Good morning, Legionnaires and guests. I want to praise and thank God for this wonderful blessing, this wonderful day, and guiding you all here safely to join us. I am extremely grateful and humbled to The American Legion for this wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime award, the Spirit of Service Award.

I thank the Warlords, HSM-51, NAF Atsugi, Japan, my squadron, for participating and supporting me in all my community outreach activities. Lastly, a big thank you to my family for their prayers, your love, and your never-ending support.

I am Levetina King. Born in Bellevue, Washington. Where's Washington? Hey, Washington. And raised in a small village called Amouli in American Samoa, the southernmost territory of the United States. It's about 5,000 miles southwest of Hawaii, just in case. With much love and gratitude, I'd like to thank my parents, Robert King and Levetina King, for raising me to be the woman that I am today. I am one of seven children, three of which also serve the Armed Forces. My sister LeTina, a U.S. Army reservist; my brother Kevin, a squad leader for the Wolfhounds in Hawaii, following after our dad, a light fighter U.S. Army veteran; and my brother J.P., a very proud Marine. (Cheers)

Yes, indeed. Following after our grandfather, Jake, a World War II Guadalcanal Marine veteran. (Applause)

Yes, indeed. You can only imagine what happens when we all gather at the dinner table. I mean, you have a Navy, a Marine, and the Army. But then football season rolls around, right, and I tell my brother, Hey, Kev, so the Navy's going to take it again this year, right? Go Navy! (Cheers and applause)

You see, I was raised in the strong Catholic faith with a very strong Samoan upbringing. We were taught at an early age that service to family is a way of life. The values I've gained from this have become the backbone for my moral compass. God, family, and village. Fast forward. I'm 25 in two weeks. My village is now my country. My family is the Navy, the proud uniform that I wear today. And my moral compass is still our Heavenly Father.

When I was in the sixth grade, I remember my sister and I would stand on milk crates to cook dinner. My brothers would go up the mountains to pick up coconuts and work the plantations to feed the pigs. My younger siblings would be outside doing yard work. These were our daily chores. This was our little way of helping out mom and dad, our little unit.

But none of these compared to the deafening wake-up calls from my mom at 5:00 a.m. every Sunday morning to get ready for 7:00 mass. 5:00 a.m., mom. I was a sixth grader. I want to sleep in, please. These chores are the basics of my work ethics, which have expanded to Japan. During my time off, I've organized and participated and performed Pacific Island cultural dances to raise money for the communities that have been damaged and are still recovering from the 2011 tsunami. I tutor English and am a camp instructor for children that are still psychologically damaged or affected by the tsunami as well. I've also helped out at an orphanage and a school for the disabled.

My family and I have had a blast these past few days. Thank you all for making it possible. During the parade, I was so proud and so moved to see sailors, soldiers, Marines of all ages stand proudly for the American flag. But I was a bit saddened to see that my island, American Samoa, was not one of those marching. Maybe this is a challenge for me. Maybe this is my personal goal, to kick start a chapter back home. (Applause)
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You see, American Samoa has one of the most highest military recruits per capita in the nation. And that I'm very proud of. (Applause)

This is just a reflection of thousands of Pacific Islanders who have served in the Armed Forces since World War I. One of those is my grand-uncle, Retired Senior Chief Salanoa, or Senior Chief Sal, of the U.S. Coast Guard. (Applause)

His 26 years of service took him up and down the North and South Pole and many countries in between. In my head, I'm thinking: What is an Island boy in flip-flops doing in the snow? One of his tours was on board an icebreaker, a U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker, the *USS Eastwind*, accompanying the Navy's *USS Glacier* during Operation Deep Freeze. Operation Deep Freeze was an Antarctica mission to fortify and establish exploration and scientific research facilities back in the '50s. There he got the opportunity to meet and shake hands with Admiral Byrd who came on board to congratulate them on a job well done. This was one of his most memorable sea stories. That and, of course, his $78 paycheck back in 1953.

I asked Uncle Sal how he managed to deal with the hardship of serving in the military and being away from home. And he said, "I love what I did. I am proud to serve my country. My faith in God has guided me throughout my career. Live, be true to yourself. Work hard and help each other. Serve your country and serve it well. If you do all these things, God will bless you, and you never know how those blessings are revealed. But when they do, my dear niece, it will open up so many doors for you."

This award, the Spirit of Service Award, is itself a blessing. And I, on behalf of all Pacific Island veterans, Pacific Island active-duty servicemembers and families, I accept this award with great humility.

As for the challenges ahead, my journey ahead, I will take my Uncle Sal's advice. Serve your country and serve it well, love your family, and keep your compass, God, close to your heart. Thank you and Godspeed. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next Spirit of Service Award is given to a Marine for his exceptional volunteer service and community leadership. In addition to personally providing 210 hours of community service, he also created the Fort Meade Volunteer Program, a program whose mission is to serve the local civilian and non-profit organizations. Since its inception in May 2015, he has recruited 145 volunteers to provide nearly 2,000 hours of community service at 55 separate events. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Staff Sergeant David Jenks, United States Marine Corps. (Applause)

STAFF SERGEANT DAVID M. JENKS: Good morning. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers, sisters, distinguished guests, thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to attend this beautiful ceremony. Words cannot express how much of an honor it is to receive this prestigious award. However, I still have to give credit where it's due.

I personally did not do all of the work here to get this. I have to thank, first of all, my chain of command, the Marine Corps Cyberspace Warfare Group in Maryland for recognizing my efforts in nominating me. (Applause)

Next The American Legion for selecting me and providing me with such an incredibly memorable experience. It has been amazing being here with you. Thank you all. (Applause)

Also, my friends and family for their unwavering support, patience, and love, including my best friend and brother, Sergeant Alexander Schitz, sitting right here in the front row, who came all the way from California, hoping I would mess up this speech. (Applause)

As many of you may know, military bases have always had a very fragile relationship with their local community. They look to us to provide that example of what Americans should be. I see it as critical for us, being the active duty military, to maintain our strong, positive reputation that has been laid down by our forefathers, all of you.
There's already so many great programs in place, Toys for Tots, Habitat for Humanity, all the things like that. But regardless of how robust we are with our community relations, there will always be those forgotten few, and those are the few that I strive to help.

One in particular, who we spent most of our time with, Hearts & Homes for Youth, nonprofit organization. For the last 50 years, they have helped over 40,000 kids, victims of abuse, neglect, or trauma. They have helped them by providing a homelike environment and supportive services, and we've had the privilege to be part of that.

So I need to thank Caitlin Ward and Chloe Perez with the Hearts & Homes for Youth organization. I would not be here without them. Thank you. (Applause)

In the interest of keeping this short, I'll end with a quote from Gandhi, actually. Just to make sure I get it right. "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Thank you all. Semper Fidelis. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next recipient has exemplified service before self by dedicating his time and efforts to many charitable organizations, fundraisers, and food drives. He earned the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for volunteering over 400 hours of community service, organizing fundraisers for a child advocacy group, a performing arts school, and an adult literacy organization. He has helped raised hundreds of dollars and increased their visibility. He also helped collect 10,000 pounds of canned goods while also competing in several races in benefit of local and national charities. Please welcome, U.S. Air Force Spirit of Service recipient, Staff Sergeant Russell Taylor III. (Applause)

STAFF SERGEANT RUSSELL H. TAYLOR III: Good morning. My name is Staff Sergeant Taylor, but most of the time I go by Special Agent Taylor. I'm with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. I first have to thank my unit, specifically Special Agent Helen Stewart. She's been an excellent mentor at work. I'd also like to start by thanking you, everyone in this room, not just for this prestigious award, but for everything you've done in your life and in your career.

Over the past weekend, I've been honored in listening to some of the stories that you have. The people in this room have done some absolutely phenomenal things with their life, and it's an honor to be here and listen to your stories.

As far as volunteering, I have to thank the lady right here in red, my mother. She's been absolutely amazing throughout my entire life. She taught me to always help people. No matter what you do, if you have the ability to help someone, then you can help them. So thanks, mom. (Applause)

Really I just want to thank everyone in this room. Individually, you're incredible people, but as a Legion, you are doing absolutely amazing things for veterans. So thank you for your service. Thank you for everything you've done for me. It's been an absolute honor to be here. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next recipient has made his presence felt throughout his community. He serves as a volunteer firefighter with the Huntingdon Valley Fire Company, while also spending his free time restoring and maintaining park grounds and collecting trash around base. A former professional hockey player, he has spent over 350 hours as a volunteer coach for the Danbury Whalers, a youth ice hockey team. Representing the Air National Guard, Senior Airman Igor Karlov. (Applause)

SENIOR AIRMAN IGOR A. KARLOV: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I first want to say this is truly a blessing to be here today. The last few days that I've been here have been one of the most memorable moments of my entire life. I have had a chance to meet many of you personally and hear many of the stories that you guys have to share with us. It's been an honor to stand here and be grateful for this award. There's something that I wrote that meant to me very personally and what The American Legion stands for.
The American Legion is the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow servicemembers and veterans. That was The American Legion mission statement.

One of the reasons why I joined the United States Air Force was because of The American Legion mission statement. I am truly grateful for everything. It's an honor to be recognized by the members of The American Legion who still wear the uniform or have worn it and hung it up. It's because of what you do that the men and women in the military can do what they do.

I would like to thank every one of you personally for being here and for making this happen, because without you guys I wouldn't be up here, or any of us. Thank you so much. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our final Spirit of Service Award is presented to a servicewoman with a contagious spirit of volunteerism and dedication. She spends much of her personal time at the Kodiak Women’s Shelter, organizing emergency housing for homeless women and children and victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. She’s an active volunteer at a local hospital, providing end-of-life support services to patients experiencing terminal illness. She has assisted in many community outreach programs and helped conduct eye exams throughout the remote Alaskan native villages. Representing the U.S. Coast Guard, Petty Officer Second Class Geneva Cornelius. (Applause)

PETTY OFFICER SECOND CLASS GENEVA L. CORNELIUS: And for one more final time, good morning, everyone. I am extremely honored to be chosen to represent the United States Coast Guard in receiving this award. I am humbled to be given the tremendous opportunity to address this company of such distinguished leadership, sponsorship, and guests, and to stand with my fellow honorees.

What remarkable deeds we all have done and sacrifices we all have made for our families, for our respective services, for our communities, and for one another within and for our great nation. I am truly inspired by the contributions and spirit of my fellow brothers and sisters in arms, and I'm truly honored to stand with them today in receiving this award.

To my astoundingly supportive friends, family, and mentors, both those who are here and as well as those who could not be here today, your unconditional love and consistent support have undoubtedly challenged me to reach higher, strive harder, and push through to achieve the goals I've aspired to accomplish.

In particular, to my baby girl, Evelyn, you are my pride, my joy, my smile, and the light at the end of all of my tunnels. You are my strength in the calm to my storming seas.

Volunteerism to me is not simply something done just for the sake of doing it, but it is a belief in the selfless act of public service and the gift of giving of yourself for the enrichment of someone else. It is not to be forced, but rather the genuine charge that we as neighborly human beings should warmly and indiscriminately feel towards one another. It is more than occupying your spare time. You're helping someone, feeding someone, or assisting with shelter. Ultimately, you're connecting with someone to fulfill a need.

Sometimes you don't realize the impact of what you do. You may have done more than what you think. And for me, it is nothing short of a blessing every day to have the capability and capacity and sheer desire to want to do for someone else. I now possess an abundance of reminiscent moments and memorable people that have undeniably changed my life and that I will never forget.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to say thank you once again to The American Legion, its associates, and the United States Coast Guard, again, for this awesome award. And God bless. (Applause)
MR. LARRY GATLIN: How about that? Here's what we're going to do. We're going to have these six young people write down their names on slips of paper and put them in Commander Barnett's hat, and I'm going to pick it out. Whichever one I pick out, I want them to run for president of the United States. (Applause)

I've been honored to be here. I have good news. Brother Rudy is out of jail. They bailed him out. He's on a private jet, and we're going to sing songs for you all tonight.

It has been a wonderful day for me, and we are in good hands with people like these and old geezers like you and me and all these people. God Bless America. For God and country. Thank you for letting me be here. God bless you all. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I tell you what, I think he's pretty terrific. Don't you? I think he's so terrific that he would look real good wearing one of these SAL caps, Sons of The American Legion, Post 82, Tennessee, and with great pride. And I salute you. That's not all. You've got to have a good-looking American Legion pin to put on your jacket. So I'd like to give you this pin from the Sons of The American Legion pin on behalf of all these great people from The American Legion Family. And I'm not finished yet. You watch yourself, buddy. I want to give you one of my coins that has the four pillars of The American Legion, and you certainly have seen those four pillars today with this wonderful group of people. Thank you so much, Larry Gatlin for what you are. And I'd like to also give you a medallion.

MR. LARRY GATLIN: Thank you. On behalf of my Marine daddy, I accept these. Thank you. For God and country, God bless. Thank you, Commander. What a wonderful day. Thank you, sir. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I want to extend my congratulations once again to The American Legion Youth Champions and to our Spirit of Service Award recipients. By the way, all of our Spirit of Service recipients are also now members of The American Legion. (Applause)

At this time, it is with a great honor that we introduce the 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the second Marine to hold the position. Our next speaker is the nation's senior military officer and a principal military advisor to the president of the United States. Prior to becoming the chairman in 2015, he served as the commandant of the Marine Corps. A native of Boston, he has served as an infantry officer at all levels and was the commander of the 5th Marine Regiment during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He earned masters' degrees from Georgetown University and Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School, Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School, and the U.S. Army War College. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. (Applause)

Address: General Joseph F. Dunford
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. And to our National Commander Dale, thanks for that introduction. But more importantly, thanks for your leadership of this great Legion. I also want to thank Woody Williams for being here today and for taking part in recognizing our award recipients. I had the distinct honor on the 70th anniversary of the battle of Iwo Jima to be on Iwo Jima with Woody Williams, and it's one of the most significant experiences of my lifetime, and I'll never forget that. Sir, it's an honor to share the stage with you, Woody. (Applause)

And Jake Comer is here. He's a past national commander from my hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts. He's also an avid Red Sox fan in addition to all the things he does here behind the scenes at the Legion. Jake, I'm happy you chose to pull us together today
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on Ted Williams' birthday, the 30th of August. I only say that because, most people don't know, before playing for the Boston Red Sox and serving in two wars as a United States Marine, Ted Williams played baseball with The American Legion team in San Diego in 1934. I only wanted to share that story because I heard Johnny Bench was here yesterday, and I wanted to have equal time with the Cincinnati Reds. (Laughter)

To the Auxiliary, the Sons, the Riders and the Legionnaires everywhere, on behalf of those still in uniform, thanks for what you do for veterans, for those of us that are still serving, and for our families. And you'd expect me to say it, but I am truly humbled and honored to be here.

As someone who's still in uniform, and I speak for all those up here on the stage now that are still in uniform, I am proud to follow in your footsteps. I'm also honored to participate in recognizing this year's Spirit of Service Award recipients. In the example of our award recipients and the Legion's recognition of these recipients, highlight our nation's most precious resource, which is our young men and women in uniform.

I've talked to a couple Legionnaires here this morning, and as I looked at the youth award recipients, and I looked at these young, impressive soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, Coast Guardsman that won the awards, I said, you know, we all have challenges we focus on in our country, but I'm not at all concerned about the future of our country if what the future of our country is what's right over here to my left. (Applause)

Speaking of the future of our country, I thought I'd begin by just making a few comments about our young men and women in uniform. Today is actually a typical day for the men and women that I am proud to represent. This morning more than 275,000 men and women are forward-deployed and forward-stationed in over 177 different countries. The current fight against ISIL is our priority, and we're taking the fight to the enemy in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya. We're also supporting partners and allies in West Africa, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. As everyone here knows, it's a global fight.

But I want to make it clear that our number one priority and the reason why we're in all those places is to prevent an attack here in the homeland. Over the past year, we've had some significant success taking ISIL leaders off the battlefield, reducing their resources, and the territory that they hold. We've also built the capacity of local forces to make sure whatever success that we have is enduring. Most importantly, we've undermined the aura of invincibility and the credibility of ISIL's narrative. They're being exposed for the losers that they are.

I'm not complacent about the challenges that we have, and we have work to do, but I can tell you with confidence that over the past year we have gained the momentum. While the fight against ISIL captures the headlines, the men and women of the joint force are doing much more. In addition to the missions against ISIL, soldiers are training and exercising in Europe to deter Russian aggression and assure our allies. Sailors are patrolling the Straits of Hormuz, the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea.

In addition to conducting strikes from an amphibious ship off the coast of Libya this morning, Marines are poised to reinforce high-risk embassies across Africa. In addition to conducting strikes against ISIL, airmen are standing watch over our nuclear enterprise, managing space constellations, and operating in cyberspace. Coast Guardsmen are interdicting narcotics on our southern maritime border. Members of the National Guard, our citizen soldiers, are taking care of their fellow American citizens in Louisiana while supporting countless other missions across the joint force.

I could go on this morning at length sharing statistics and talking about what your troops are doing, but I'd rather share with you two stories that will tell you all you need to know about the quality, the courage, the competence, and the commitment of the men and women that are actually proud to be following in your footsteps.

Two weeks ago I was back home, and I went to Pembroke, Massachusetts, to help dedicate a memorial for two of our nation's fallen heroes, Lieutenant Brian McPhillips, United States Marine Corps, and PFC Matthew Bean, United States Army. Like all of our
Legionnaires in the room today, Brian and Matthew chose to serve their country simply because they thought it was the right thing to do. In joining after 9/11, they knew that their service would in all likelihood put them in harm's way.

Brian McPhillips' dad served in Vietnam and inspired Brian to join the Marine Corps. Brian was a great son and a brother. He was a baseball player with a keen interest in history. He was active in community service to include helping educate the youth of the inner city in Boston. After graduation from Providence College, Brian was commissioned as a lieutenant of Marines. Less than three years later, he was serving in Iraq, and I was proud to serve as his commanding officer in Marine Regimental Combat Team 5. During the march to Baghdad in the spring of 2003, our scout platoon commander was seriously wounded. The scout platoon was a group of Marines that were at the point of a 20,000-man formation of the 1st Marine division. They were in soft-skinned vehicles in advance of our armor to help identify where the enemy was.

One day we lost our scout platoon commander due to serious wounds, and this was the unit's first time in combat, and the battalion commander was quite concerned about the unit and wondered if he could get him back in the fight. Brian McPhillips was in the battalion and volunteered to take the scout platoon under absolutely no illusion of the risk he was incurring. That mission was arguably the most dangerous mission in that formation of 20,000 Marines. But due to Brian's experience as a leader, due to his reputation, due to what the Marines in that unit thought of him, they very quickly got back in the fight under his leadership. On April 4, 2003, Brian was killed on the outskirts of Baghdad, leading his Marines from the front.

As news of Brian's sacrifice rippled through his hometown, there was a local high school student who, like Brian McPhillips, had a reputation in the community as a young man with tremendous potential and one who looked out for others. He was a member of the varsity football and wrestling teams, and he was a leader in his church. When that young man learned of Brian's death, he was moved to action. That young man, in the words of his pastor, "felt he could not sit this one out." That young man was Matthew Bean.

Inspired to serve by the memory of Brian McPhillips, Matthew joined the Army in 2006 and volunteered for the infantry. Matthew never did anything halfway. If he was going to serve, he was going to do it on the front lines. In 2007, Matthew deployed to Iraq with the Army's 10th Mountain Division, and on May 19, 2007, after two of his fellow soldiers went missing in an ambush, Matthew volunteered to join a patrol to find them. On that patrol, Matthew took up a position on a rooftop and his unit to search door to door in the heart of Sunni Triangle to find those lost soldiers. While providing over-watch to his fellow soldiers, Matthew was struck by a sniper's bullet, and he succumbed to his wounds 12 days later. Inspired to service by one brother-in-arms, Matthew died searching for another.

Both Brian McPhillips and Matthew Bean demonstrated the timeless truth, "greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend." Those are words that the folks in this room understand. In fact, it's the example of the men and women like those gathered here that inspired Brian and Matthew to serve. When I joined the families two weeks ago to dedicate plaques in their memory, The American Legion was there with a strong and vital presence. (Applause)

Pembroke's Post 143 does what so many posts do in cities and towns across the country. They support local veterans and their families, they sponsor community programs, and they honor the memory of the fallen like Brian and Matthew.

You know, a lot of folks here today question the youth of America, as I mentioned earlier, and at one time we disparaged them as the Nintendo Generation. But that's not what I have seen over the past 15 years of war. Today's men and women, just like their predecessors, attack their mission and do what must be done. When times are hard, they simply tighten their chinstraps and they drive on, not focused on strategy or policy, but focused on taking care of their buddies and on winning.
And, again, that's not a coincidence. The link between past and present is in this audience. It stretches from Woody Williams to the newest member of The American Legion. I see older veterans mentoring the young, passing down the values and the qualities that make our nation great. I see the young caring for the old, and I see a new generation of heroes like Brian and Matthew.

Since 1919, The American Legion has led the way in veterans’ affairs, national security, Americanism, and youth programs, and today the Legion continues the legacy started almost a century ago. Through grassroots efforts, the Legion has become a critical advocate for 21 million veterans and our servicemen and women. When a recently separated veteran needs assistance in finding a job or transitioning back to civilian life, you are there. When a wounded serviceman or woman requires help with prosthetics or assistance in cutting through bureaucratic red tape, you are there. When families of servicemembers or veterans require emotional, logistical, or financial support, you are there. 

(Applause)

And when a veteran or active-duty servicemember is laid at the final resting place, you're there too. Ladies and gentlemen, what you do not only takes care of our people and makes a significant contribution to our communities, it directly supports our combat effectiveness. What you do directly supports our combat effectiveness.

The men and women that are in uniform today, me included, we don't look over our shoulder to check our six to see if somebody has our back. No generation, I would argue, has deployed with more support at home, more appreciation at home, than the generation that currently serves. And no organization, no organization, is more responsible for that than The American Legion. 

(Applause)

And I think it's important, before I close, that I highlight that your efforts, they have another important impact, and that's to encourage future generations to serve. I think George Washington once said it best. He said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war shall be directly proportional to how effective the support for veterans of earlier wars was and how appreciated those veterans were by their nation." I think what George Washington said was true then and it's true today. 

(Applause)

That's what I've seen in my own experience, it's what I saw in Pembroke, Massachusetts, two weeks ago, and it's what I see in this room today. This morning I'll leave by making you a promise. If you, our American Legion, continue to do what you're doing, those of us in uniform will keep doing what we're doing. And we're going to work every day to make you, those who we are proud to follow in your footsteps, we're going to work every day to make you proud. Once again, ladies and gentlemen, it's an absolute honor to join you. Thanks for recognizing the future of America that's here today. God bless you all, and Semper Fidelis. 

(Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I just gave General Dunford one of my coins. See, they have strict rules and he follows the books because we had a lot more we wanted to give you, sir, and thank you for blessing us with your message. Thank you for being here and thank you for leading these wonderful military personnel that you brought with you and keep up the great work and we love you and God bless you and Godspeed. 

(Applause)

The woman elected to lead the American Legion Auxiliary has worked many years for veterans and their families and has held numerous offices at every level of the organization. She is the member of the Department of Illinois and is eligible through her husband, Past National Commander Marty Conatser’s service during Vietnam and her son, Rick, who served during the Gulf War. She is also eligible through the World War II and the Korean War service of her father, Clay. She retired from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is an active member of her community and of Faith United Church. Please welcome our former first lady, and the leader of the nation's largest patriotic women's organization, National President Sharon Conatser. 

(Applause)
Hello, American Legion Family. I would be remiss if I didn't recognize all the past national commanders in the room. I know you've probably been recognized, but from the bottom of my heart and The American Legion Auxiliary, we thank all of you for your service, not only to our country, but to our American Legion Family. Thank you, past national commanders. (Applause)

There's another group that I want to recognize, and I'm very proud to be a part of. I'm very proud to be a part of the past first ladies. If there are any past first ladies in the room, would they please stand and accept my thanks for your support this year during my tenure as national president. (Applause)

And this is something different. I know we have two types of dual members, the Legion and the Sons. But this time I would like to recognize those female veterans that are both members of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. Please stand. (Applause)

I visited with many of them during my travels, and I was so proud when they would say I'm a dual member with The American Legion Auxiliary and very proud to do that. They attended luncheons across the country, and it meant so much to me. So thank you for your membership in The American Legion Auxiliary. Thank you to all veterans. But thank you to The American Legion for giving me an amazing commander to work with. (Applause)

I know you say every president stands up there and says that. But, you know, we all believe that and I know I have the best one. Even though my husband is a past national commander, don't tell him that. (Laughter)

But we have walked the walk. We've talked the talk the entire year. When we travelled to foreign countries, Dale was very wonderful to make sure that The American Legion Auxiliary was in the forefront, along with The American Legion. Every wreath laying, every meeting with dignitaries, every American Legion post, unit or squadron or department function we attended, we were welcomed as a family. We are a family. I'd be remiss if I did not thank the Department of Illinois, team Illinois. Where are you, Illinois? (Cheers and applause)

Without their support, this would not have been possible and I would not be serving as the national president of the largest women's patriotic organization in the world. The memories are great. But most of all, I thank everyone for their friendships. Dale and Donna and Marty and I and Dewey. Thanks, Dewey. We traveled many miles together, but we were there. We were there at Junior Shooting Sports. We were at Boys Nation. We were at Girls Nation. We were at the American Legion World Series. We were there as a family, and I thank The American Legion national commander for that privilege. Thank you so much, Dale. (Applause)

On your seats this morning, I think you found a little sheet of paper to help The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation win $6,000. We would appreciate your support by voting every day between now and September 30. It's very easy. And we have a computer set up in the Auxiliary office on the third floor, if you just want to go up there and vote. But we can win this right here at National Convention. We're in a heated race with another nonprofit out of Indiana. And we want to win that money to further the mission of our organizations.

Once again, I cannot say enough except thank you, keep serving our veterans, our military, and their families. Be active in your communities and let them know that we are the go-to organization family to make their dreams, make their life easier. We can do this. We will do this. Continue to work every day for our mission. Continue to work every day for our military, because now more than ever we need to be there for them. Thank you for your service. May God continue to bless each of you, continue to bless our troops, both
here and on foreign soil. But most of all, when we wake up in the morning, let's thank God that we can live in the most wonderful country, America. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Sharon, thank you very much for your service, for your orientation on The American Legion Family, and on behalf of these wonderful members of The American Legion, I would like to present you a medallion for your service to our four pillars of The American Legion. Thank you so much. *(Applause)*

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: A 57-year member of The American Legion, our next speaker is the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from the battle of Iwo Jima. Risking his life beyond the call of duty as a demolition sergeant with the First Battalion, 21st Marines, 3rd Marine Division, Corporal Hershel W. Williams advanced alone with a 70-pound flamethrower to eliminate enemy machine gun fire on February 23, 1945. Covered by only four riflemen, Corporal Williams returned repeatedly to his own lines to prepare demolition charges and obtain serviced flamethrowers. He fought off enemy bayonets and riflemen, wiping out one position after another. He fought through the remainder of the five-week-long battle and was wounded on March 6, 1945.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, he was awarded a Purple Heart for his actions at Iwo Jima. He later retired as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 in the Marine Corps Reserve and also served as chaplain of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for 35 years. I've also found out today that one of his proudest accomplishments is his continued service to his own church as he continues to be a Sunday school teacher in his home church. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome a true American hero, Hershel “Woody” Williams. *(Applause)*

Address: Hershel W. ‘Woody’ Williams, Medal of Honor Recipient

Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Commander. Will you please present yourself before me. *(Laughter)*

On behalf of my fellow Medal of Honor recipients, it is my extreme pleasure to present to you this book containing photos and stories of some of the most famous people in the world. My fellow recipients. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Before I start, I want to say that I'm a charter member of The American Legion. Now, you didn't think I was that old, did you? But we have a American Legion post in Barboursville, West Virginia, 177, and I happen to be a charter member of that post. So I am a charter member. *(Applause)*

Second thing I want to do, I know we have a lot of national commanders here, people who have been commander of this great organization over the years, but we have one in this audience by the name of Miles Epling, a Marine in Vietnam. So hello, Miles. *(Applause)* They told me I had 15 minutes; I'm going to use every bit of it. *(Laughter)*

I'm very thankful for this opportunity to come and share my thoughts and to be among my fellow Americans who have such great value in our country.

General Dunford, I think, has had to leave, but one of his Marine brothers tells the story that he, as commandant of the Marine Corps, would always enjoy going down to Quantico and speak to the Marine candidate officers who eventually are going to lead Marines into battle. And because of his devout interest, sometimes he would get lost in his talk and talk longer than he should. I promise I won't do that.

But General Jim Jones said that he went down there one day and it was a large group of candidates. So he did talk longer than he should because of his enthusiasm. And he was just about finished, but one of the candidates got up and started to walk out of the hall. Well, you don't walk out on the commandant of the Marine Corps. So he said to the candidate, "Candidate, where are you going?" He snapped to attention and said, "Sir, I'm
going to get a haircut." He said, "Why didn't you get that haircut before this meeting?" He said, "Sir, I didn't need it then." (Laughter)

Members of this great organization, the women that keep us straight and order us around, members of the military and all of those families, many of them in this group who gave a loved one so you and I could be free, what an honor it is to be able to speak that and to be a part of this group. For many this will be a day of remembrance.

Some of our youth by their awards today, their life changed. They will not be the same person they were before they arrived. And because of those who lost a loved one protecting our country and protecting us, those who died in combat or in any other way gave their life in the Armed Forces of this great country. For them the war never ceases. The war is never over. And yet there is great thanksgiving because we have people who love their country so much, want to protect their family and their values that they're willing to go to battle and, if necessary, sacrifice their life.

In the little community of Institute, West Virginia, you can drive through and never even see it, but in that little community the very first Gold Star Family Memorial monument was dedicated on October 2, 2013, to honor those loved ones, particularly we thought in West Virginia, because on a veterans memorial, on our capital grounds, there are 11,000 names inscribed in that memorial. 11,000 West Virginians who gave their life for America.

The requirement to be on the memorial, based on the legislation, was that they had to die at the hands of the enemy. Death in any other way did not qualify. So the families of so many thousands in West Virginia had never been recognized. And this memorial in a state veterans cemetery did that for the first time. (Applause)

Donel C. Kinnard was a most unusual individual in our community. But his history is all over in many communities. But Donel C. Kinnard, the cemetery has his name on it, and he was just an old country boy born way out in the country. But he had a value of his freedom and his American heritage that he valued almost as much as his life. He served seven tours in Vietnam. He was a SEAL, SEAL 2. He received seven Purple Hearts. He received the Navy Cross, the Bronze Star with a V. And yet, after he came home, he didn't feel that he had completely done his part. And how true that is of so many members of The American Legion.

So he continued to devote his energy and his loyalty to make West Virginia and the lives of veterans and their families better. Don and I were talking one day, and I didn't know that he had seven Purple Hearts, but he mentioned it in our conversation. And I said, "Where did you get hit?" "Oh," he said, "a piece of shrapnel here and another one there, and another one someplace else." And I said, "Well, Don, it looks to me like after five times you would have known how to duck." (Laughter)

Today, we're not only thinking of those who sacrificed their lives for us. Even they sacrificed for a people they didn't even know. But we also pay tribute to those by their action and sacrifice because there are others every day, not only in our military but those in our community. Some of them, our relatives, placed their life on the line every day.

So many of us take for granted those things that are everyday occurrences. And maybe it's because they are part of our family or part of our community or we know them and we speak to them on the street. But they do that not knowing when they get up in the morning and go to their job in the fire department or in the law enforcement, that they're going to get back home that night. Every time a fire truck leaves the station, every time that dispatcher answers the call for help by a law enforcement officer, their lives go on the line.

I have said too many of them, I believe and feel that you are under more stress than I was when I was facing the Japanese. I knew my life was on the line, and I knew there was somebody out there that wanted to kill me. But I also knew what I was facing. But that's not true with them. They have no idea when they jump in that cruiser and head to answer that call or they jump on that fire truck and speed to a burning home, they have no idea what they're going to face. So they put their life on the line every day for you and me.
Could we take just a moment, center our thoughts and then give them a round of applause and thanks for their service. Could we do that? (Applause)

They, as we, who enter the military when we take that oath, it means something. They are saying, as we did, for my freedom, for the privilege of being an American, for the privilege of serving, I commit myself to do my duty. It may require my life. But these gifts in the greatest country on Earth are that important to me.

The Gold Star Family monuments that are being erected and dedicated all over America, California to New York, to Georgia to Florida, to Texas, Tennessee, you name it, Ohio will have four before the end of this year, in various cities of this state. And they're saying to the families of those who sacrificed a loved one in the Armed Forces, we honor your sacrifice and we will not forget. Future generations who are going to look upon these memorials, I hope they realize they are free because of the sacrifice of others.

We have a foundation, this is kind of a commercial if you will, we have a foundation and communities are getting involved in that foundation all over the country. And, by the way, we do have a booth next door, in case you were interested. But the foundation has a goal that we set when we formed it that we would have at least one, at least one of these memorials in every state in this union. Because every state has given loved ones for all of us.

In West Virginia, and we have a motto, and we proudly say it very often: Mountaineers are always free. I'd like to suggest the motto for America. We all want peace, peace in our country, and peace in our souls. So my suggestion is: Peace we seek. Peace we will keep. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Woody, on behalf of The American Legion I will tell you the message that you just gave, I can understand why you teach Sunday school. You have the peace in your soul, and may the peace be with you during the rest of your life. I'd like to give you one of my national commander coins on behalf of The American Legion of our four pillars.

When you go to those Legion functions and when you go out in the community, I'd like to give you a diamond lapel pin to honor your service and your example to what it means to be an American Legion member. And most of all, when you look at the medallion, very clearly the words "For God and country" are listed. And if there was ever a man that represents for God and country, certainly you are that man. God bless you. (Applause)

Wow. The American Legion is proud to bestow its highest honor on our next guest. The Third United States Army Infantry Regiment is the Army's official ceremonial unit and escort to the president. The Regiment also provides security for Washington, D.C., in time of national emergency or civil disturbances.

Also known as “The Old Guard,” the unit served in combat roles covering the Indian Wars, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, World War II, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. The meticulous soldiers of the Old Guard always stand watch over the Tomb of the Unknown 24/7 in extreme heat, cold, rain, wind and snow. Please turn your attention to the video monitors for a short video.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal to the Third United States Army Infantry Regiment. Representing the Old Guard today is the Regimental Commander, Col. Jason Garkey, and Command Sergeant Major Scott Beeson, both new members of The American Legion. (Applause)
Presentation: The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal
3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard)

COLONEL GARKEY: Good morning. Mr. Woody Williams, National Commander Barnett, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting Sergeant Major Beeson and I to the 98th American Legion convention to accept The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal. We accept this medal on behalf of the past and present members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry, some of you who are in the audience today.

The American Legion does a tremendous job fostering the brother and sisterhood of service to our nation while maintaining the principles of citizenship and duty. Your contributions to veterans and the nation are truly remarkable. The commitment to mentoring our nation's youth and supporting our communities with wholesome programs while advocating patriotism and citizenship is inspiring. Receiving the acknowledgment from this distinguished organization is truly humbling.

The American Legion serves as a focal point in many communities. I remember as a young boy going to American Legion Post 466 in Eureka, Illinois for pancake breakfasts, seeing the post commander present citizenship awards at graduation ceremonies, and more importantly attending Boys State before my senior year of high school.

Ironically I was the regimental commander at Boys State as well. Little did I know that was not going to be the last time I earned that title. I guess the Legion must have known something I did not. But this truly is a tremendous privilege and honor for me to accept this award on behalf of the regiment.

Earlier this summer I rejoined the regiment as the 81st commander. I previously served in the Old Guard, and I fully understand what a privilege it was to return and accept the responsibility to lead the Army's official ceremonial unit and escort to the president. What a privilege it was to serve with some of the finest men and women who represent that less than 1 percent who volunteer to serve, and ultimately, the ultimate privilege, to honor our veterans through ceremonies in Arlington National Cemetery and the nation's capital.

Members of the Old Guard are part of a great lineage dating back to 1784, as you heard during the video. We trace our roots back to George Washington's personal guard, which is why our Alpha Company still wears the colonial uniform and carries General Washington's personal colors today. The regiment has seen service in war, peace and occupation, but our current mission is to honor our fallen and represent the Army to the nation and the world.

On May 1, 1946, General J. "Lighting Joe" Lawton Collins created our charter. It reads: There will be established as near the center of Washington as possible a show camp to operate the year-round as an example of how the Army lives, trains and works. This camp should be a model one, of course, but need not be too large. It will be manned by picked men, both enlisted and officers, who would be rotated in and out of the camp, perhaps as an award for superior performance. This will be the Army showcase to the people of Washington and people who visit Washington. Less than two years later on April 6, 1948, the 3rd United States Infantry Regiment was reactivated on the Capitol steps. The men and women of this charter are the soldiers of the Old Guard. We are America's regiment, your regiment. If I could get you to please direct your attention to the video screens, I want to show you a quick video.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

I have to admit it's a little tough to follow that video. Few units do have such a strong bond with former recipients of the Distinguished Service Medal. This award can be tied to the foundations of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment in Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. General Charles P. Summerall, who served at Fort Myer from 1903 to 1905, received the award in 1951. Many soldiers of the regiment have spent countless hours standing on parade on Summerall Field. General John J. Pershing, also a recipient, was the founder of
the U.S. Army's band, Pershing Zone. Together with Pershing Zone, we conduct all of the Army's ceremonies in the national capital region.

However, most notable to The Old Guard was the 1958 presentation. In 1958, The American Legion recognized unknown servicemen from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. The unknowns live only in the memories of their comrades and families with no known final resting place. They didn't earn every honor imaginable, nor did they achieve the highest rank. Nonetheless, these men and women died fighting for the nation's freedom. The unknown gave their country absolutely everything, even their very identities.

Since 1948, The Old Guard has been guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Through hurricanes and blizzards we will continue to do so with dedication and honor.

As the Army's official escort to the president, this award also affords The Old Guard an opportunity to be recognized with such distinguished gentleman and past recipients like former presidents Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George Herbert Walker Bush and George W. Bush, all recipients of this distinguished award.

Sharing a place amongst America's leaders who we notably serve strengthens the significance of this honor. The Army and the Old Guard share the common goal of supporting our veterans through once a soldier always a soldier. The Old Guard regularly supports honor flights as you saw in the video. That program brings veterans to the nation's capital to visit the memorials which honor their service and sacrifice. The Old Guard also cooperates with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, and supports Gold Star Families through memorial affairs and survivor outreach services.

We bring in children for day-long tours of our installation to help them gain an appreciation for the regiment and what we do. But more importantly to assist these children coping with loss to see a new perspective of their loved one's service and sacrifice. The Old Guard conducts one of the most unique missions in the United States Army.

Receiving The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal for our contributions to veterans is the highest tribute. Honoring servicemembers and the fallen is an ongoing mission that will always be our highest priority. When a citizen attends a ceremony with the 3rd United States Infantry Regiment, it could provide the only interaction they have with the Army. We strive to make that experience the best it can be. We strive to the highest standards so that their experience with America's regiment fortifies their confidence in America and the nation.

The Old Guard proudly shares a commitment to our nation with The American Legion. We accept the obligation freely to support and inspire our veterans and our citizens. So Sergeant Major Beeson and I truly are honored to be here, especially amongst a group of people who so selflessly added to the history which we're simply caretakers to carry forward.

Once again, thank you for this highest honor. And in closing we pledge to steadfastly execute this noble task and relentlessly revalidate your faith and confidence in America's regiment. God bless America, The American Legion and the United States Army. Old guard, Army strong. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We are certainly proud of all of our military, but we're especially proud of the Old Guard and their commitment. And on behalf of The American Legion, I'd like to give you your membership. I'd like to give you a diamond lapel pin. By the way, they have a post at the Old Guard, and I hope you wear this at the post meeting. And then the national commander's coin of the four pillars, I hope you have better understood it after being with the great American Legion Family this week, and I hope you accept it with our heartfelt gratitude to both of you for your service to our nation.
and your continued service to your community. Thank you all. Let's give them a big round of applause. (Applause)

The man who led the Sons of The American Legion through another successful year is a 32-year member of Squadron 1 in Anchorage, Alaska. Year after year, membership in the Sons continues to grow. The commander’s eligibility is from his grandfather, World War I veteran Charles W. Moeller. It was a pleasure traveling with Commander Kevin and seeing him passionately discuss his theme, which was ROCKED. An acronym for Remembering Our Commitment, Keeping it Every Day.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the 2015-2016 National Commander of the Sons of the American Legion Kevin Collier. Come on up here, Kevin. Thank you. Let's give him a big round of applause. (Applause)

Greetings: Kevin Collier, Alaska,
Past National Commander, Sons of The American Legion

Thank you, members of The American Legion, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, guests one and all. What a wonderful time and opportunity to be able to come and address The American Legion National Convention.

This year, Commander Dale and Madam President Sharon and I, we not only talked the talk about being an American Legion Family, we walked the walk. And literally in a couple of events, we did actually walk with Commander Dale, and including one I don't think he'll ever forget and I don't think I will either.

When we were in Hawaii, he gave me a bad time about the plaid shorts that I wore. So I don't know why. We were all in shorts because it was nice and hot and sunny. So afterwards he gave me a bad time. So when we visited his homecoming, I just thought he was jealous and wanted a pair. So at his homecoming, we presented him with a pair, a matching pair. So we had matching commanders shorts and that.

Well, I guess he didn't. I'm not sure if he really liked them or not. Because he went and brought them back to National Convention of the Sons of the American Legion, and he actually stopped, paused, and put them on to demo them to show what they looked like and then he turned them back over to me so that we could raise money again for one of The American Legion programs. And so when I get it done, we're going to raffle it off and raise money for the National Emergency Fund, and we're going to make sure Georgia wins it again so Commander Barnett can wear those when he's out there golfing as he goes out of office. See, you're not going to get rid of them quite that easy.

But this year has been a great and fantastic year. The Sons of the American Legion has done a wonderful job on their membership. This year we came in to convention at over 101.5 percent membership. (Applause)

That was fantastic. We were about 89 percent on our renewal rate, not quite where we wanted to be. Our goal was 90 percent. But, you know, we'll take what we can get. That was a great start, a great thing. So by the time we finished the year, I'm sure that we'll be over the 90 percent.

Then we did so much in donations, as you heard we did $366,000 plus to the Child Welfare this year what we have adopted as our signature programs. Great job! (Applause)

One of my goals and dreams this year was to reach that ever little, just out of reach, that $7 million mark for the Child Welfare Foundation. We came into convention, we were about $75,000. Okay, we'll have to wait until the fall or maybe the spring NEC to make that. Well, Saturday, just before we closed for the day, asked for any donations. So we just kept getting donation after donation after donation, including one from the detachment of Arizona for $35,000. I'm going, okay, this is a large sum. By the time they closed, we had $110,000, making the $7 million mark for the Child Welfare Foundation. (Applause)

That, as the phrase goes, was a little slice of heaven when we reached seven. So it was fantastic. I couldn't have asked for anything better as an outgoing present to me, to
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American Legion and to the Sons of the American Legion for us to reach that goal. Now, I know the incoming commander, he's going to have another goal and he's going to try and reach the next step. But that's quite a ways away. So I don't know.

But what I really want to do is thank each and every one of you, every veteran in here, for your service, for your continued support of the Sons of the American Legion, one of the programs that you have that we do the very best we can to work all the other programs, work the four pillars. That's why this year, this past year, we've worked under the theme of ROCKED -- R-O-C-K-E-D -- Remembering Our Commitment, Keeping it Every Day.

And this year, the Sons of The American Legion definitely did that as we worked for our veterans, worked for our youth, worked for national security and worked for Americanism. We definitely did that. And it was with the support and the help of The American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion.

Because as we always say, we're all cogs in that wheel of the great big machine called The American Legion Family. And without each of us working together, we wouldn't succeed in what we're doing. And we're growing and we're doing well. And we are going to continue to work and help The American Legion.

I know every time that national commander came to our convention or to one of our DECs, he's going, you guys are doing a bang-up job. We're 2,000 or 6,000 or 15,000 higher than we were the last time, but how are you guys doing that? Well, we just do what we need to do to bring in membership. And like they always say, we just ask. Well, we're going to continue to ask. But we're also going to strive and try and work, help The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary grow also. And hopefully with all of us working together as a family, we can both grow next year, and throughout the years, and continue to be the strongest veterans organizational family, working together for our veterans.

So Commander Dale, I did have a present for you. I ordered a jacket for him. If some of you have seen our Sons of the American Legion jackets from Alaska, it has a great big emblem on the back, has our name and stuff on the front. Well, yours came in but it didn't come in quite right. Instead of having an American Legion logo on the back, it had an Auxiliary. (Laughter)

And while I know you belong to the all-male Auxiliary there in Alaska, it's Unit 21, I didn't think it was quite appropriate. It had the wrong state, the wrong title, well, the wrong name attached. It had "Dale" and "Conatser," and I didn't think that was quite right. So unfortunately I'm having it redone. It's not here, but we'll get it to you at the fall NEC because I know you'll be there.

So thank you, American Legion, for having elected such a wonderful, true gentleman, a true Legionnaire, and a great friend in Mr. Dale Barnett. So thank you. And thank you for your service. I salute you guys. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Kevin. And on behalf of The American Legion, I want to present you the medallion from The American Legion for God and country. Thank you for your service. He does so much for the families up in Alaska. Has for many, many years. Thank you, Kevin. (Applause)

Many of you may have heard the news that the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers has refused to stand for the National Anthem before his team's games. I have just issued the following statement to the news media. The headline: "American Legion to Kaepernick: 'Show support. Show appreciation.'"

"Cincinnati, August 30, 2016. The leader of the nation's largest veteran organization called NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the National Anthem before his team's games. I have just issued the following statement to the news media. The headline: "American Legion to Kaepernick: 'Show support. Show appreciation.'"

"On behalf of more than 20 million U.S. military veterans, I think most of us respect his right not to stand, but we also find the actions 'highly regrettable.' American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett said.

"The United States has provided incredible opportunities for Mr. Kaepernick. This
country allowed him to become a very wealthy celebrity that was able to pursue his dream. We admit that this country is not perfect and could improve in some areas, but the vicious attack on law enforcement is unwarranted. (Applause)

"Moreover, the freedoms that Mr. Kaepernick has been able to enjoy were provided by veterans who made tremendous sacrifices on behalf of citizens like him. Instead of focusing on all that is negative about our country, he should remember what's great about America and be an example to young people who may aspire to the same success that he has had."

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of sharing with you this press release, and I thank you for standing up for Old Glory and standing up for America. (Applause)

You may have heard that we have some special guests joining us this week, the Democratic and Republican candidates for president of the United States. The American Legion invited these two guests to discuss issues of importance pertaining to veterans and our military. The campaigns were both reminded that this is not a political rally, and we do not endorse or favor any candidate or political party. Please show both candidates the utmost of respect. Secretary Clinton will be speaking to us at 12:15 tomorrow, and Mr. Trump will be speaking to us at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday. All security will be in place at 6:30 a.m. Please get here early. If you're not in the hall tomorrow by 11:30, you may be not let in at all during Secretary Clinton's speech.

I now call upon National Adjutant Dan Wheeler for some additional details about these important events. Mr. Wheeler.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Thank you, Mr. Commander. Secretary Clinton is expected to speak Wednesday at 12:15. Mags will be placed in front of Exhibit Hall A Fifth Street side. That should be all five doors magged, and one mag will stay on indefinitely. Elm Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets will be closed to vehicular traffic. Attendees can obtain entry into Exhibit Hall A at 0700. Shuttles start at 0600 due to the Southern Caucus breakfast and the Central States breakfast.

If you leave Exhibit Hall A, and the only way you can leave is through the magged doors, you must go through those mags again. Plastic bottles can be brought into the hall. However, no aluminum cans or anything that can be turned into a projectile will be allowed in. Everyone should be in Exhibit Hall A by 11:30 a.m. or risk the chance of not obtaining entry in order to hear Mrs. Clinton's speech. Restrooms are located in the back of the hall to the audience's left. The rope line is anticipated, but that could change. Once she leaves, the hall will be open as usual.

On Thursday, candidate Trump is expected to speak at 9:00 a.m. The mags will be set up the same way. Elm Street between Fifth and Sixth will be the same way. Attendees can obtain entry into Exhibit Hall A at 6:30. Shuttles might start at 0600, but we haven't got the final word on that yet. If you leave the exhibit hall, you must go through them again. Same thing applies about plastic bottles. They may come in, but no aluminum cans or anything that could be turned into a projectile. Everyone should be in Exhibit Hall A by 8:30 or risk the chance of not obtaining entry. Restrooms are located in the back of the hall on the audience's left. That completes the announcements, Mr. Commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Dan. Next I would like to call the chairman of The American Legion Riders Committee, Bob Sussan, to the podium so he can help lead the presentation of Legacy Scholarship Fund donations. Those presenting checks will please proceed to the microphone, announce the amount and donor, and go to the front on the floor for a photograph to my right. While the photographs are being taken, I now ask National Vice Commander John Hargreaves to assume duties at the podium.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Hargreaves assumed the Chair.
Thank you. National Commander Barnett, national officers, fellow Legionnaires and Riders. Over the past year, we lost a great rider, great friend, Past National Commander Tom Cadmus from Michigan.

The Legacy Run this year, and you'll see a short video in a moment, went through seven states, 1,300 miles, and was quite unique. We did eight reflagls, one post rededication, and visited ten American Legion posts. We have engaged marketing to assist us in getting the word out, and we had over 125,000 media impressions. We had media at all stops, live TV at all but one stop, and we were live on two stations in Tupelo, Mississippi, raising awareness for the scholarship fund of The American Legion and The American Legion Riders. I'd like to draw your attention to a short video.

... At this time, the Delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

Thank you. The Gold Star dad in that video was Dan McClaughlin from Tionesta, PA. It's his second year on the Legacy Ride, and he finds great comfort in riding with us and being with his fellow riders. This year we broke the records. We hit 555,000 on the ride. I have no idea what we've collected behind stage. Departments will now come up and introduce themselves and advise their amount.

Additional Donations to Legacy Fund

DELEGATE BURKETT (FL): Hi. My name is Andy Burkett from American Legion Post 323, Lehigh Acres, Florida. With me is Dennis Boland, a member of my post at 323 and Mike "Gambler" Raymond a member of our district 13 riders. I'm here because of Adam Sandoval, ScootinAmerica. We'll give you a check for $98,620 that was raised by him alone. So for the two years, for the two years now, our final is $191,610. Thank you.

DELEGATE RAMOS (FL): My name is Jim Ramos from the Department of Florida. I have with me Past National Commander Clarence Hill; Mike McDaniel, our adjutant; and Al Porter. We're giving you a check today of $72,840.94. Thank you.

DELEGATE YERMAS (NY): Jim Yermas from the great state of New York. On top of what we've already donated, today a check for $17,401.

DELEGATE DAVIS (NY): Dave Davis, New York State American Legion Riders director. Today we are presenting from New York Riders $29,563.21. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): I have three additional checks from the Department of Texas. From Alamo Post 2, check for $1,000; Seguin Post 245, $2,000; and Converse 593, $7,500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (DE): Good morning from the great Department of Delaware, the Small Wonder. This year we've been able to raise $15,103.50 for the Legacy Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): From Naperville, Illinois, Post 43, $300. Also from Post 43 Legion Riders, $3,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): The great state of Illinois, $17,840.

DELEGATE SALAK (NE): Good morning, Mr. Commander, delegates, and guests. My name is Dave Salak, and I am the state adjutant for the Department of Nebraska. With me is Past Department Commander Rollie Ott and our delegation chairman, Mike Reimers. I had the following Legacy Scholarship donations. From Morse Bluff Post 340, $100; Geneva Post 68, $500; St. Paul Post 119, $1,000; Columbus Post 84, $1,250; Papillion Post 32, $5,000; for a combined total of $50,223. Additionally, sir, a Rider from Alabama, Tony Benonato, asked me to present a check for $50.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): On behalf of the Department of Pennsylvania, Past National Commander Dominie DiFrancesco, Ronald F. Conley, in addition to what
we previously sent in, we would like to present a check for $2,198. Thank you. God bless.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SD): From the great state of South Dakota, the home of American Legion baseball, The American Legion Riders of South Dakota donate $3,020.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): Welcome from the great state of Arizona, the host of the 102nd National Convention, and where our heat is a dry heat. We have checks from 19 ALR chapters in Arizona.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): For a total of $33,801.91, American Legion Riders.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): And, in addition, from the great state of Arizona, our Legion Family members donate an additional $3,000.

DELEGATE PISA (AK): The Alaska Legion Riders, where we compete against the moose and the bears and the rain and the snow and the wind, we proudly present $15,600.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CT): Greetings from Connecticut, the home of the UConn Huskies. We have three checks totaling $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WI): Our collections this past year, including a three-day Run for Pride, the Legion Family, Department of Wisconsin, proudly donates $48,000.

DELEGATE SOUCIE (HI): Aloha. I'm the Department Commander from the state of Hawaii, Michael Soucie. Every year part of our fundraising for the Legacy Scholarship includes a pin that we sell to make money. I'm going to give the pin, number one, to Commander Barnett, and my post commander and Rider director is going to announce our total.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (HI): Yes, we have 22 members in our chapter, and this year through our fundraising and our pin sales and a considerable contribution from Post 44 in Kwajalein Atoll, we want to present a check for $4,800.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): On behalf of Michigan's second annual Legacy Ride, helping me present this check is Commander Larry Money and Past Department Commander Jim Wallace. Please accept our donation of $15,491.50. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): From our post, Post 69 in Alameda, New Mexico, we have donated $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): Good morning. Representing the Show-Me State and 960 Legion Riders and the Legion Family from Missouri, we're presenting a check for $90,834.19.

DELEGATE BRYANT (OK): Bobby Bryant. The American Legion Riders and the Department of Oklahoma proudly donates $1,150 to the Legacy Fund. Thank you all.

DELEGATE VAIL (KS): Good morning. I'm Ray Vail, Past Department Commander for Kansas, and on behalf of The American Legion Riders and the members of Kansas American Legion, it's our honor to present a check for $21,763.81. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MS): From what The Weather Channel called the land mass between Louisiana and Alabama during Katrina, Mississippi, and on behalf of the Department of Mississippi, $3,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CA): From the great state of California, in addition to previous donations, we have from Chapter 471, $1,000 and from Chapter 82, $2,500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CO): From the great state of Colorado, in honor of Past National Commander Tom Bock, the state would like to donate $1,900 to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund.

DELEGATE KING (VA): Charlie King from Virginia, Post 293. We have donations from three posts and a total of $2,200.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): On behalf of The American Legion Riders from Stevens-Christian Memorial Post 557 in Wintersville, Ohio, I'm honored to present $5,000 for the Legacy Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): The great Garden State of New Jersey donates

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (GA): On behalf of the Department of Georgia, we donate $14,755.59.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (RI): The Legion Riders of Post 2, West Warwick, Rhode Island, donate $536.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NH): From the Granite State of New Hampshire, we have a donation of $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): From the great state of Idaho, on behalf of The American Legion Riders in the state of Idaho, $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NC): From the great state of North Carolina, the home of the World Series baseball, we have $2,252.82.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. From the Department of France, the home of The American Legion, I'm proud to present $500 from the Department of France; and from the home city of the Department of France, Paris, France, $700; for a total of $1,200. God bless you all.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): From the great state of Kentucky, home of great basketball, I have $1,000 from the department; $500 from Auxiliary 203; and $750 from Chapter 203.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): From the Department of Kentucky, Lexington Post 8, Man-O-War, $1,000.

DELEGATE JOHNSON (ME): I'm Pete Johnson from the great state of Maine. I'm here with Paul L'Heureux, one of the founders of our Legion Riders in Maine, and we are proud to contribute $4,800.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): From the great state of Texas, Granbury Post 491 gives a total of $3,000.

DELEGATE MOORE (FR): Ron Moore. I rode along on the ride. We gave some money as we came along. Unfortunately, my department lost me again. In addition to what they gave, another $150 and another $300. God bless you. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SC): Bringing greetings from the great state of South Carolina. I'm joined with the state Commander, Bob Scherer. It's our pleasure to tell you our boys brought in $53,400.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MN): From the Land of 10,000 Lakes, where your national commander walked on water, Minnesota, and after several state rides, combined mileage well over 2,000 miles, and in the presence of our American Legion Family in Minnesota and Flat Paul, our liaison who's currently deployed, we present you a check for $148,367. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: Our next guest has served Ohio's 1st Congressional District for 18 years. A lifelong native of Cincinnati, he previously served as city councilman and Hamilton County Commissioner. As a member of Congress, he has served the House Committee of the Judiciary, the Committee on Small Business, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs. He is a leading advocate for fiscal responsibility. Please give a warm welcome to Representative Steve Chabot.

Welcome: Honorable Steve Chabot
United States House of Representatives

Thank you very much. Hello, I'm Congressman Steve Chabot. You're in my congressional district right now, and it's an honor and a privilege to welcome all of you here to Cincinnati for The American Legion's 98th National Convention.

For those who don't know, I represent Ohio's 1st Congressional District, which includes most of the city of Cincinnati, including all of downtown Cincinnati. It's western
suburbs, out to the Indiana border, and all of Warren County, which is to our north.

In Congress, I currently serve, as it was mentioned, as the chairman of the House Small Business Committee. On that committee, one of our principal goals is helping small business owners and entrepreneurs to get access to capital, in other words, money, that's needed for them to start or grow a business so they can create more jobs for more Americans. Last year one of the committee's primary accomplishments was enacting legislation. Something that became law. The president signed it to help veterans who want to start or grow a business to get access to that necessary capital by waiving fees on their small business loans. So it's easier for them now to get one of these loans. They don't have to pay a fee, which can be thousands of dollars.

The way I see it, the men and women in our Armed Forces are an incredibly strong and deep pool of talent who have received outstanding technical training while they were in the military. Let's take advantage of that. When they are ready to leave the military, they can be a key driver of economic growth and job creation. By waiving loan fees, we are making it easier for veterans to start a business and help lead our nation to a brighter economic future.

I also serve on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Judiciary Committee. It's my work on the Foreign Affairs Committee that oftentimes brings me into contact with leaders all around the globe. Many of these leaders don't have much in common with each other. They speak different languages, they have different values, and they celebrate different customs. But there is one shared understanding among all the world's leaders, and that's that they understand that America is synonymous with freedom.

We should always remember that our freedom is envied around the globe. America's special, and it is the American people, and particularly our veterans, that make it special. We must never forget that the freedom with which we are blessed here in the United States of America has been fought and paid for many times over with the blood, sweat, and tears of the men and women who have served and are serving in our nation's military.

And we as a nation must take care of our veterans, those among us who recognized our country's need, who answered that call, who rose to the occasion. We also owe it not only to our veterans to make certain that we take care of them, but we need to take care of their families too. That's why I was honored last week to speak to those members of The American Legion who participated in the National Convention Legacy Run, which we just saw a number of the dollar amounts coming here from various chapters around the country who participated in that Legacy Run.

As many of you know, the Legacy Run is a motorcycle ride to raise money to help children who lost a parent, principally in Iraq and Afghanistan, also on 9/11, police officers, firefighters. It helps their children, now that they're gone, to go to college. Events like the Legacy Run play a big part in our national efforts to honor and make sure that we never take for granted the sacrifices of our veterans and their families who have made these sacrifices to keep all Americans safe.

Before I go, I'd like to present to The American Legion here a flag which was flown over the United States Capitol building in honor of the 98th National Convention. So if somebody could come up from The American Legion, we'd like to give you this flag, which at our request was flown over the Capitol building. It also has a certificate verifying it did fly over the United States Capitol building in Washington.

Let me conclude by saying God bless each and every one of you, God bless your families, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I was truly honored when the congressman joined us at Harrison, Ohio, at the end of the Legacy Run. I was also honored to hear how he helps veterans and the story of the veteran who needed to get back and had a passport issue to visit his wounded veteran that was in the hospital. He made it happen within 24 hours. That's the kind of person he is and his love for veterans. Sir, I'd like to
give you a medallion from The American Legion for God and country. Thank you so much. (Applause)

My hand is hurting. I got to report to you, adding everything together, where we started with the Legacy Scholarship and what we just got turned in, and there may be some more out there. The total this year to date for the Legacy Ride and the Legacy Scholarship Fund is $1,155,363.03. (Applause)

Incredible dedication of our American Legion Riders. What an honor it was to ride with them. I would like to call our national vice commanders, if you would, to join me onstage for our next presentation which will be given by Bron Mogenis, trustee for the Chapel of Four Chaplains Foundation; the foundation chairman of the board is Louis Cavaliere; and the foundation executive director, Christine Beady.

Presentation: Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion
Bron Mogenis, Trustee, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation
Louis Cavaliere, Chairman of the Board, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation
Christine Beady, Executive Director, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation

Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests, it is my distinct pleasure to be here before you and to introduce you to a little bit of information on the Chapel of Four Chaplains memorial chapel in Pennsylvania. We have two of the executive officers with us. We have Christine M. Beady, executive director, and Lou Cavaliere, who is the chair of the board. And my name is Bron Mogenis. I'm wearing two hats today. I am a member of the NEC. I'm a new NECman for the Department of the District of Columbia. And I'm also a member of the Chapel of Four Chaplains.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about it. In the past, we gave you very little information in your folder. This time Christine Beady went through a lot of trouble to tell you a little bit about the chaplains, a little bit more, to tell you a little bit about what they've done last year, tell you a little bit about what you can ask for help if you have a special mass and you want special words or special photographs. The Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia at The Navy Yard can help you.

Having not been born in this country and remembering my days at Ellis Island when I was eight years old with my parents, it's precious to me, when we're talking about selflessness, talking about Americanism, talking about giving something at no cost. No tradition of American society is more precious to or characteristic of our culture than that of voluntary reaching out to neighbors in need. Such selfless service is part of our civic and religious heritage. It's hard to disregard people in the service who at these times not only give their time in selflessness by staying in the service for 20 years or more, a lifetime, but then coming out of the service and joining The American Legion. We're the ones that promote Americanism and the things that really count.

The Chapel of Four Chaplains is a nonprofit organization. It's founded upon the shining manifestation of our heritage that four Army chaplains, who after giving their jackets to soldiers who had none, linked arms with one another and went down with the USAT Dorchester. That was on February 3, 1943. The historical event happened at Torpedo Junction, the U-Boat-infested waters of the North Atlantic during World War II.

On January 23, 1943, the USAT Dorchester, an old coastal steamer, quickly pressed into service, left New York Harbor to Greenland. The Dorchester was escorted by Coast Guard cutters. Most of the men were seasick. The weather was bad. On February 2, 1943, the sonar system picked up submarine in the area of where the Dorchester was. The captain ordered the men to sleep with their clothing, the lifejackets close by, and they were only 150 miles from Greenland. Once they were over Greenland, they would have air cover.

On February 3, 1943, an enemy submarine fired a torpedo at the Dorchester's flank. The missile exploded in a boiler room, destroying the electricity, electric supply, releasing suffocating clouds of steam of ammonia. Many, many soldiers died instantly. There were
over 900 on board. Some trapped below. Oversized and overcrowded lifeboats capsized in icy waters. The sole order came from the four chaplains who walked around trying to calm the young men. They opened up the storage locker, and in their help, they distributed lifejackets. Soon the supply of lifejackets was exhausted, and several survivors reported watching the four chaplains either gave away or forced upon the young men their lifejackets. That was the only means of their saving themselves. The chaplains gathered together and led the men around them in prayer and linked their arms in brotherhood, their heads bowed below. They sank beneath the waves.

We encourage future selflessness, superhero-ness. For this reason, in 1951 President Truman established and recognized the humanitarian awards and established the chapel, which is in the old Navy Yard in Philadelphia. The humanitarian award is given for a lifetime or a career of outstanding humanitarian service which has profoundly affected the quality of life in our community, state and nation.

Let me just name a couple people that have been awarded the award from the Chapel of Four Chaplains. Notable recipients are former Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Carter, Reagan, and Bush. Some luminaries include Mickey Rooney and Bob Hope. And this is something that these people have earned, and I'd like for you to give them a standing ovation for the selflessness of service that they have provided. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion from the Chapel of Four Chaplains is granted for extraordinary contributions to the well-being of others at the national or world-level, to world peace, or to inter-faith or inter-ethnic understanding. The Medallions are being presented by Bron Mogenis, trustee, Chapel of the Four Chaplains; Foundation Board Chairman Louis Cavaliere; and Foundation Executive Director Christine Beady.

They are being awarded to National Commander Dale Barnett, National Vice Commander George E. Cushing, National Vice Commander Jimmy F. Lane, National Vice Commander John W. Hargreaves, National Vice Commander Alan A. Davis, Sr., and National Vice Commander David L. Gough.

MS. CHRISTINE BEADY: Congratulations to all of you. I just wanted to say a few words before we finish up. One, I want to just thank Bron Mogenis for all of the years he has served as our liaison here for the Chapel. We couldn't do what we do here today without his assistance throughout the year. So thank you so much for everything. (Applause)

I just wanted to thank, too, along with my chairman of the board, all of you because at the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, The American Legion, the posts, the Auxiliary, the Sons, the Riders, all of you contribute to the success of the foundation, and without you, we would not be standing here today. So I congratulate each and every one of you for continuing your support of the chapel.

We have a membership drive as well coming up. So I'm sure you'll see that coming up. But I also wanted to talk to you a little bit about what we're doing really quick. So for all the stuff that we do throughout the year, and several of you have visited the chapel throughout the year. It's always exquisite for me when I'm standing at the chapel, and here comes a group of Riders through The Navy Yard, which always scares The Navy Yard because there's always such a loud group of you coming in.

And to come in unexpected and just to tour the facility and see what we have there, it's just an amazing piece for us, and it really does show how much we've done over the last four and a half years that I've been on board to really rejuvenate and rebuild the foundation. And having you all be there with us throughout that has just been extraordinary for us. Captain Cavaliere stands as our chairman of the board of directors and has been with me for about three years, and we travel across the country. I have to say, out of all the military conventions that I attend, this is the best every year. (Applause)
So I just want to say come visit us. If you're in Philadelphia, if you're traveling by us, come see us. You'll see everything that we're doing. The best thing that I say every year is, again, thank you so very much for everything that you do. God bless all of you. Thank you all for your service, and we look forward to next year. Take care. (Applause)

Presentation: Certificate of Appreciation (Posthumous)
H. C. ‘Ted’ Kelley, Pennsylvania, National Chaplain

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The man who was appointed as our National Chaplain this year was truly a man of God and a dedicated Legionnaire. It saddens me to speak of him in past tense, because Reverend H. C. "Ted" Kelley passed away in April.

Our warm American Legion Family condolences go out to his wife, Linda, his sons, and grandchildren. We would still like to honor Dr. Kelley. He was a Navy Chaplain during the Vietnam War, a Legionnaire for 55 years, and a chaplain for the Department of Pennsylvania. Accepting his Certificate of Appreciation is Past National Commander Ron Conley of Pennsylvania. (Applause)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER CONLEY: National Commander Barnett, delegates to this convention, it was with great sadness that shortly after Reverend Kelley was appointed the national chaplain in Baltimore that he was overcome with cancer. God probably needed Reverend Kelley more than The American Legion, but he was truly missed. We appreciate Reverend Cash stepping in and filling in for Reverend Kelley. He showed up at Reverend Kelley's funeral.

On behalf of Reverend Kelley's family, on behalf of the members of The American Legion Department of Pennsylvania, I accept this, and we will make sure that his wife receives it. May God bless Reverend Kelley because, if he would have been the national chaplain, you would have been in for a real treat because he always had a smile, he always had a joke, he always had that Irish humor, which I appreciate. Thank you very much, commander, and God bless The American Legion. (Applause)


Presentation: Certificate of Appreciation
Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North Carolina, Acting National Chaplain

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I would also like to recognize another man, Acting National Chaplain Tierian 'Randy' Cash. A member of American Legion Post 30 in Lincolnton, North Carolina, he is a retired Navy captain who served as a chaplain in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Liberia, and many other places during his 30 years in uniform.

He was appointed national chaplain of The American Legion for 2014-2015. He graciously offered to substitute for National Chaplain Kelley during his illness. It is an honor to present Chaplain Randy with his certificate of appreciation in recognition of his service as the acting national chaplain. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Due to scheduling conflicts, the two senators from Ohio are unable to be with us. The senior senator, the Honorable Sherrod Brown, did, however, send video greetings. Please turn your attention to the monitors.

Welcome: Honorable Sherrod Brown
United States Senate

Hi, I'm Sherrod Brown. It's a privilege to serve as Ohio's United States Senator. It's a privilege to welcome you all to Cincinnati. Thank you to Commander Barnett for your outstanding leadership. Thank you to all the Legionnaires for your service to our nation, for all that you continue to do for your communities and our country.

I want to thank your families for their sacrifices. Families so often don't receive the thanks and appreciation that they so rightly deserve as they support those who serve. Our veterans don't often speak about their service. That's the way my dad was, a World War II vet. Humility is a trait that runs deep among those who selflessly served our country. Many of you returned home, you hung up your uniforms, you continue to serve your communities and your professions, and as Legionnaires.

Through your scholarships, to your food drives, to your assistance for other veterans, those who are facing homelessness, you as American Legionnaires never stop giving back. Rarely do you ask for recognition, but you've earned it many times over. As many of our veterans are able to come home and grow old with their loved ones, you face unique challenges. That's why it's so important that we give you the opportunities and the quality care that you deserve.

I'm humbled to serve all of you on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. I take that duty very seriously. This year I joined my colleagues in introducing the Veterans First Act, a comprehensive bipartisan bill to grant veterans and their families expanded benefits and to ensure that the VA has the resources to provide veterans with the highest quality of care. It will expand scholarship opportunities for family members. It will crack down on greedy for-profit colleges that exploit veterans. It will increase housing options for homeless veterans. It will expand a critical program to support veteran caregivers.

We have a duty to all those who served, to honor you not only in granite and stone, but through action. We owe you every opportunity to live a life that befits your service and your sacrifice for our country. It's an honor to serve those who served our country as all of you did. Thank you so much, and as all of you continue to, thank you so much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Our next guest is a retired Air Force senior master sergeant, whose military career included one year at DaNang Air Base in Vietnam. He is also a retired police detective and a member of American Legion Post 700 in Howland, Ohio. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 2015-2016 Past Department Commander of Ohio, James W. Campbell. (Applause)

Welcome: James W. Campbell
2015-16 Commander, Department of Ohio

Good morning, America! Commander Barnett, National President Sharon, to even be in the presence of a Medal of Honor winner, recipient Williams. To General Dunford and our Legion Family, our Legionnaires our Auxiliary, our Sons, the Legion Riders, 1.1 plus million dollars for our scholarship fund. We are The American Legion. But I'm here to welcome you on behalf of Ohio who, after 30 years, have the honor this year to welcome you to the great Buckeye state. From the best damn band in the land and national champions, our Buckeyes from -- O-H! ... Chorus of I-O! To Cleveland and our national champions, the Cavaliers. To your host city and the home of the Cincinnati Bengals, we welcome you to Ohio.
We have worked with the national corporation and our Ohio delegation tirelessly to make sure that your stay here in Ohio is one that you will remember and hope that you will want to come back to our great state. On behalf of our incoming commander Ron Chapman, our Department of Ohio, our staff, and over 103,000 Legionnaires in the state of Ohio, welcome to Ohio.

Before I leave the podium, on behalf of Ohio, personal privilege, Commander Barnett, we would like to thank you this year for your leadership, your expression and your direction for the veterans and how you have served The American Legion. Sir, it is an honor and a privilege to stand before you, and on behalf of Ohio, we say thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you. And, Jim, before you leave, I'm proud to give this medallion to you and to the Department of Ohio for sponsoring this National Convention and for the great National Convention we're having. I know it's a lot of hard work, but thank you for doing it and thank you for all the things that the Department of Ohio has done for The American Legion this year. Thank you.

A past national vice commander, past member of the NEC and a past department commander, our next guest is an Army veteran who has held many positions at every level in The American Legion. He retired from the Taylor Trucking Corporation in Mt. Gilead, Ohio, and served on his town’s city council. He belongs to American Legion Post 97 in Cardington, Ohio. Please welcome the president of The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Ohio, James C. Morris. (Applause)

Welcome: James C. Morris, President
The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Ohio

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Department of Ohio and convention corporation, I want to welcome everyone to Cincinnati. I hope you have a great time. I do want to take a little bit of time and thank all my volunteers from Ohio that helped put on the parade, help did the badges and packets and did everything else. Would all my volunteers back there, please stand up and be recognized. (Applause)

Without those folks, we also had a bunch of ladies from the Auxiliary and members of the SAL all volunteer to help, which has made this job a lot of fun. We've been working on it now for about four and a half years, and I hope everybody has a great time in Cincinnati. If you have any complaints, see somebody else. But thank you very much for coming and enjoy yourself the rest of the week. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: This man has worked very hard. I've seen him running around in all the different hotels, all the different venues. James, we thank you for your dedication, long years of dedication to The American Legion and certainly your dedication to make sure that the 98th National Convention at Cincinnati was the best it could possibly be. Thank you, sir, for your service. (Applause)

Today we are most fortunate to have with us a gentleman who has dedicated his life to Canada’s veterans and their families. He is a veteran with more than 34 years of service in the Canadian Coast Guard. Legionnaires, please join me in welcoming Brian Phoenix, the past dominion president of The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada. (Applause)

Greetings: Brian Phoenix, Past Dominion President
Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada

Commander Barnett, National Adjutant Wheeler, special guests, comrades all. It gives me great pleasure to once again join you to bring greetings on behalf of our newly elected Dominion President Reverend Canon Thomas McKnight and the executive and members
We had the pleasure a few weeks ago to host National Commander Barnett, Past National Commander Dan Ludwig, and Dewey Moss at our convention in Winnipeg. Although their time with us was short, we enjoyed having them immensely and look forward to the next time they visit.

Now, I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. You heard I was with the Coast Guard. I'm also the son of two World War II veterans. Growing up at my household, I always had veterans around me, whether it was friends of the family, or my parents, and I learned an awful lot from them about duty, honor and country. They showed me a route that I took, and I ended up going into the Canadian Coast Guard. But before that I was a Sea Cadet. I was a bugler in the Drum Bugle Corps, played "Last Post" for many a veteran. It was a good way to play hooky from school and I got away for a few days at times, and I traveled a lot, down to the United States, Pennsylvania, New York, also over to Great Britain.

And all that time I've met servicemen and women who have served their countries honorably to teach us young individuals the duties that we should be doing. And one of the duties I took on was I started off as the sergeant-at-arms at my unit which you call a post, but we call a unit. Then, after fulfilling two-year term at that, within four years I was the unit president. And then I was only given about a three-month hiatus, and then I became a dominion vice president. And it takes us from a dominion vice president, which is number seven, it takes us 14 years to be the dominion president. Then you have two years' term in office. And then you're two years immediate past president, and then you are two years on awards. So basically it takes you 20 years to get completed through our system. So I have a long service record. I met a lot of veterans.

And I want to tell you, one of the things that I learned talking to veterans is they'll tell you all about the funny stories, the things they did, but I'll give you one little quick anecdote on that. I went to my father and I had him sign an application form which allowed me to get his service record. And in the middle of the war, there is AWOL, which means absence without leave. And I says, "How could you do that in the middle of the second world war?" Well, they came across a winery. So you can imagine why it took four days.

So there's lots of little stories like that that I could tell you, and there's only one other I would say. My mother, who served in bomber command in Great Britain, and Great Britain is pretty cold in the wintertime. They're only allotted so much coal for the heating in their accommodations. So mother and the girls that were with her from the Air Force took turns and they'd have to go and sneak, okay, take, coal, a bag of coal so they could keep warm. And they rotated amongst themselves. So those are some of the anecdotes and little things that you find out that you didn't know. And as for their service, very little of it. If you really talk to a veteran they'll tell you about the good times, fun times, you hear very little about the stories of the things that they did. But I guess I should continue on with my speech. I thought I'd let you know a little bit about me.

The men and women of the Armed Forces of our countries established this friendship and brotherhood as comrades in arms in the past wars. This bound and forged in combat made our relationship unique and enduring. Today, our mutual concern for our troops, our veterans, continues to join us together. Our motto of my association is shoulder to shoulder. As well, we should never forget the importance the role of the family plays in all of this.

If you think about it, the spouse is a real unsung hero to the men and women that we send off to war. A spouse will most likely have to give up their career to enable a military member to be away on courses or assignments, frequently up to six months, a year, or even longer. Should there be children in that family, then the spouse will have to do double duty in satisfying those requirements to the family. All without the support of his or her loved one.
It is our duty to ensure that no matter where our veterans and their families are in their lives, our governments should uphold the social covenant to ensure the injured and their dependents are cared for by a grateful nation for which they have offered to lay down their lives to protect.

Again, thank you for having me here with you this week and for all the wonderful hospitality. God bless you all, God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Brian, on behalf of The American Legion and especially our ANAVICUS members, we stand proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends of the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada, thank you for your service. And on behalf of The American Legion, this medallion. Thank you, sir.

The Royal Canadian Legion is committed to securing adequate pensions and benefits for veterans and their families by dealing directly with the federal government. Our next guest hails from Labrador City, Canada, and was awarded the Legion Meritorious Service Medal, the Queen's Golden Jubilee and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Royal Canadian Dominion President Dave Flannigan. (Applause)

Greetings: Dave Flannigan, Dominion President
The Royal Canadian Legion

Good afternoon. Thank you for your kind words. National Commander, honored guests, members of The American Legion, and I will say comrades, and I feel very secure in saying "comrades" here today. On behalf of our nearly 300,000 members of the Royal Canadian Legion, more than 1,400 branches located in Canada, United States, Germany, the Netherlands and Mexico, I bring you greetings. It is a pleasure for me to be here at your convention and it's an honor to be able to speak to you today.

Before I came here, I spoke to my predecessor, Tom Eagles, who had visited you at your last year's convention. He told me of the warm welcome and the kind hospitality he received. To be honest, I'm still overwhelmed by your kindness and your generosity during our stay here in beautiful Cincinnati.

For many of us here today, looking back, we see that the 20th century represents a particular hard set of challenges to our basic freedoms, rules of democracy and basic human rights. Today, the struggles continue. Mostly against terrorism. Despite the changes to the nature of welfare, our collective responses, largely through NORAD and NATO, has continued, so most our shared commitments to the welfare of our servicemen and women.

It is this common history of serving shoulder to shoulder with each other as well as a shared belief in the welfare of our veterans that makes our organizations the leading veterans organizations in our respective countries. We have gained so much attention and respect in doing so. I have been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion since 1976, and I take considerable comfort in the knowledge that it is conducting the business of helping veterans, both The American Legion and the Royal Canadian Legion, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, will do whatever is necessary to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the best care and support that we as grateful nations can provide them.

Allow me to give you a few examples of the common purposes by highlighting some initiatives that we are pursuing in Canada. The OSI Special Section. This past June, the Royal Canadian Legion created an Operational Stress Injury Special Section. The establishment of the OSI Special Section will facilitate veterans and their families affected by operational stress injuries to get the medical care they need and help to focus research and education about OSI. The objectives of this section includes: To reach out and assist veterans and their families affected by OSI; to promote public awareness and work to destigmatize the public perception of veterans with OSI; to bring focus to the sufferers through assistance, referrals, information and awareness; to promote research into
treatment and prevention. But the OSI Special Section will not and cannot deliver health services itself. Our delegates at the June convention wholeheartedly supported this new section and especially its work to destigmatize the OSI.

The Invictus Games 2017, Orlando in 2016, and now Toronto 2017. The Royal Canadian Legion announced its commitment to further supporting the recovery of ill and injured veterans by becoming a signature sponsor for the Invictus Games 2017. Legion members will also take part in the torch relay which will stop at 30 Legions across our country and provide some 1,500 volunteers needed to run 11 sporting events with participants from 16 different nations.

Veterans support: The Royal Canadian Legion renewed its contract with Veterans Affairs Canada allowing trained and security-screened Legion volunteers to visit 6,800 Canadian veterans in almost 400 facilities on an annual basis. These are veterans that are being supported by VAC in various long-term facilities across our country. We are also working with Veterans Affairs Canada to develop a national standard of Canada for service dogs, with Canadian General Standards Board.

There is also a pilot project being supported by our government to evaluate the use of service dogs as a safe and effective treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. As part of the project, Canadian veterans with PTSD who do not have a service dog and are willing to acquire one from a participating training school, are recruited to take part.

In addition, annually the Legion provides a Taste of Home gift bag to deployed Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP personnel on Canada Day. Similarly, gift packages of maple products will be handed out during Christmas season as part of the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Service Operation Santa Claus.

Our national Poppy Campaign. The annual Poppy Campaign continues to be our most important project for the Legion, with more than 21 million poppies and supporting materials distributed in 2015. Although we are still awaiting the final financial reports for 2015, an estimated 17 million was spent across Canada on veterans in need in 2014. The need remains, and we remain committed to helping our veterans through our Service Bureau Network.

National Foundation: This year the Royal Canadian Legion has created the Legion National Foundation that allows individuals and corporations to make tax deductible donations. The aim of this foundation is to promote the effectiveness, efficiency and morale of the active and retiring members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families for the benefit of the public by educating the public about Canadian military history; awarding scholarships anniversaries to families of active and retired military and Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Police, Mounted Police, for post-secondary education, professional vocational training; and continuing our support to veterans and their families as well as honoring our heroes.

The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League, the RCEL, continuing today, the Royal Canadian Legion supports 103 Commonwealth veterans and 108 widows in the Caribbean. These veterans served the Crown during WWII. Legion programs are centered in the provision of individual assistance and it totals $167,200 was distributed in the past year. We are responsible for veterans in 16 countries in the Caribbean area. And we visit some of these countries every two years. During the visits, we meet with our veterans, widows in these countries, to ensure that they are receiving the monies provided and the care that they are entitled to.

We also work with allied veterans and/or their families and widows in financial need who live in Canada. For instance, we provide immediate assistance in the form of food and gift vouchers. Visits to Legion service officers are also arranged to complete their applications for further financial assistance. For those in severe financial crisis, we act as a conduit to provide quarterly assistance.

Homeless veterans: In 2012, the Royal Canadian Legion established a national homeless veterans program called Leave the Streets Behind. Based on the groundbreaking
work of Ontario command, the program's mission is to reach out to homeless veterans and/or near homeless veterans by providing immediate assistance, support when it is needed. It also connects them with the appropriate social and community service to establish a long-term solution to meet their needs. Today, the Leave the Streets behind program is operated in Ontario, B.C., Yukon, Alberta, Northwestern Ontario, Nova Scotia Nunavut Commands, and was just launched in New Brunswick Command. The Legion is working to make sure that program is available in all provinces. All told, the Legion has helped thousands of homeless and near homeless veterans since this program began.

I highlight these initiatives to show you just the important work we do and the positive impact we have on the lives of our veterans. In doing so, I hope to have demonstrated to you and our shared belief in the ability of our respective organizations to respond to the needs of veterans and their families so that we can relieve some of the hardships and sufferings that they face.

Much like The American Legion, the Royal Canadian Legion continues to make grade strides towards better support for our veterans and their families. This means that we still need to make changes. We still need to modernize and make sure we stay relevant in our communities. Finally, we must never forget that we need to support our veterans in their world and adapt to their new normal by being proactive and promoting this support. It is our belief that this approach will have a positive impact on our membership numbers. After all, our veterans do not join the Legion to go to meetings. They join because of our programs.

Let me close by saying that our respective organizations have been called the hinge to the door for the care of veterans. A hinge between the need of the veterans community and that of the government social contract with veterans. If it's true, and I believe it is, then we can play a pivotal role in the renewal of our respective governments' obligations towards the health, welfare and care of our veterans. There is a role the Royal Canadian Legion is prepared to play and has played since the last 90 years. We look forward to our continuing relationship and support in years to come. God bless America. Thank you, comrades. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Dave, thank you so much for what you do for your veterans in Canada, and thank you for your service to your country and your partnership and friendship with our country, the United States of America. Thank you. And I would love to give you a medallion on behalf of The American Legion. Thank you.

The bond between the United States and Great Britain is a special one. Our militaries have served side by side during two World Wars, the Korean War, the Gulf War, Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Our next guest is a retired Army major. He was elected to the Board of Trustees for the Royal British Legion in 2014. Please welcome National Chairman of the Royal British Legion Terry Whittles. (Applause)

Greetings: Terry Whittles, National Chairman
The Royal British Legion

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Before beginning, I just wanted to point something out. I thought it was quite interesting that this morning all the young people who made such wonderful speeches all had pieces of paper with their speeches on them. And here I am, a 68-year-old Brit with a tablet. However, of course, being ex-service myself, I've got a paper backup just in case. (Laughter and applause)

National Commander, distinguished guests, fellow Legionnaires, ladies and gentlemen, and I use the term "fellow Legionnaires" quite deliberately. Though we belong to different Legions, The American Legion in your case and the Royal British Legion in mine, I believe we share a common bond and a common purpose: That is, looking after the interests of our servicemen and women, past, present and future.
First of all, thank you for the kind invitation to address your convention, and I do bring fraternal greetings from the United Kingdom. Everybody I’ve met here has been very welcoming. And I’ve learned a lot about what is happening in both The American Legion and more widely what is happening in the United States with regards to the serving and the veteran community. So thank you to all those who took the time to explain things to this particular Brit.

It's a long way to come from England to deliver a five-minute speech. But that's not the point. The point is to uphold some of the values we learned while serving in our respective Armed Forces. Those are giving support, holding out the hand of friendship, providing comradeship, and recognizing and respecting our differences. Those are the reasons I think it's worth traveling for over 12 hours to get here.

As I said in my opening, we share a common bond and a common purpose. Though there are some differences in the way we're organized and some of the services we provide. But I found it interesting that we do have such a lot in common. Such as: Both our Legions were formed in the aftermath of the First World War. Though I've got to say you did beat us to it by about two years, as you were formed in 1919. We didn't form until 1921. Both our Legions have a membership. Again, your membership is around ten times larger than mine. We stand at around 250,000 members, compared to your more than two million. And more importantly, I think we're both very successful at lobbying our politicians at all levels on behalf of the service and ex-service community.

So what is the Royal British Legion? In the UK, we are best known actually for being the national custodians of remembrance. So I was really pleased to spend some time on Sunday with the World War I Centennial Commission and the Defense Prisoner of War Missing in Action Accounting Agency, or as they described themselves to me, "the girls from Hawaii."

But we do do so much more than remembrance in the UK. Important though remembrance is. I don't know the figures in the United States, but in the UK, there are over 2,000 military charities. But I am very proud to say that the Royal British Legion is larger in size and scope than the next five largest added together. And we spend around one and three-quarter million dollars per week every week directly helping our service community and their families. I don't know if one and three-quarter million dollars a week sounds a lot to you, but please do remember we are quite a small country. The U.S.A. is 41 times larger in area and has five times the population.

Like you, we do have our major successes. But also like you we have areas of concern and frustration. One of these concerns Gulf War illnesses, sometimes referred to as Gulf War Syndrome, because unlike the authorities in the U.S.A., our government has no plans to invest in research or to convey the results of other research into this particular set of illnesses. We continue to campaign on behalf of people who served in the Gulf and suffer from those related illnesses. And I want to thank the American people and, in particular, The American Legion, for all their and your work in this area. It gives us solid data. It gives us solid data when we're trying to convince the UK authorities. Some of our other big challenges at the moment are in the areas of drug and alcohol misuse and management of debt. For some reason these things seem to be more prevalent in the service and ex-service community than in the wider population.

I could go on for quite a while yet, but that would be rude. So on a lighter note, I want to tell you about an ad campaign that's being run by the Las Vegas Tourism Authority on the London Underground Railway System. And of course when I say London, I mean London, England, not one of the eight Londons you have in the U.S.A. Anyway, part of their ad campaign says: "Las Vegas, where your English accent is an aphrodisiac."

Well, I've been in Cincinnati three days, and all my accent seems to have done is confuse people. Are you Australian? Are you Canadian? I had intended to ask the national commander whether he could move next year's convention perhaps around 400 miles south of Reno, which I think is about where Las Vegas is, but perhaps it's not even worth it,
commander.

Fellow Legionnaires, keep up the good work, whichever nation we belong to, we must always, always remember the fallen, honor those who are serving and those who have served, and be there to help those who need it. Thank you again for the opportunity to address The American Legion. And enjoy the remainder of your convention. But I've not quite finished.

I brought a small gift for the national commander from the UK. Don't know if he drinks whisky. But this is the Royal British Legion Chairman's Choice, which was selected for us in 2013, I think. It's a 1999 single malt Scotch whisky, and there are only 320 bottles worldwide, and it was provided by the Royal Vintners, the vintners to Her Majesty the Queen. So I hope if he doesn't enjoy it, somebody in his close family may do. National Commander, my thanks. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: And, Terry, on behalf of The American Legion and your friendship and Great Britain and what you do for your veterans in Great Britain, I want to present to you a medallion from The American Legion, and thank you for your service and thank you for your friendship.

Taiwan is a nation that is always vigilant. Because of its proximity to Communist China, the Taiwanese military is prepared for an attack that could come at any time. The Taiwanese people also know that taking care of veterans is an important priority when fielding a strong defense. We are fortunate to have with us the deputy minister from the Veterans Affairs Council of the Republic of China. Please welcome Lee Wen-chung. (Applause)

Greetings: Lee Wen-chung, Deputy Minister
Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China

The pleasure is all mine. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to meet you in Cincinnati. Good afternoon. Besides the introduction of National Commander Barnett, I would like to briefly introduce myself. I was the Director of Overseas Liaison Department of the Veterans Affairs Council, VACROC, Republic of China, Taiwan. Due to the governmental reform and the innovation, I shifted my position to be a chairman in joint venture to money for all the VACs placement foundation. I did good, and my company really earned some, and it was excellent. And that way put all the earnings to the placement foundation for all veterans and their families. (Applause)

Thank you. I'm so glad in Cincinnati that I meet a lot of our VACs, old friends, national commanders, national presidents and those in Alaska. (Applause)

I would like to send our best regards to you. Our minister, General Lee, is so honored. And on behalf of General Lee, I am so glad and privileged to speak at The American Legion 98th National Convention. I would like to convey our minister's best respect and commendation to The American Legion for your dedication to your veterans and their dependents. (Applause)

The American Legion and the VAC have had a strong relationship since 1950, about 60 years. And at that time, VAC was built with the assistance of The American Legion as well as the United States. In the past 30 years, almost, they have maintained and exchanged visits. Every year we are so proud that we may host the national commanders, national presidents to visit Taiwan. Just because your advice and comments is really important for us to improve our care and services to all the veterans and their dependents. So we could not have but arrange a very, very, very tight schedule. This past year, National Commander Barnett, National President Conatser and your party visited Taiwan. We hope that you had enjoyed your stay in Taiwan with us. (Applause)

Thank you. Additionally, the most important reason that we have a lasting relationship
is because we share the same values and the same interests in striving for the respect for the benefits and for the compensation for active and retired soldiers. (Applause)

They contributed their prime years for the military and they have sacrificed their life on the front to fight for global security and stability. United States and ROC Taiwan have always had a profound relationship in pursuing the peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, and international justice. Moreover, Taiwan's development is in the United States interests in Asia Pacific region. So citizens in Taiwan continue to undergo military transformation to gain self-defense capability and to join the economic and the trade pact such as the Transpacific Partnership, the TPP, it's really important and crucial for our country.

ROC Taiwan is situated in the center of the first island chain of the United States West Pacific Defense Line. The values of the strategy is very unique and significant. Taiwan has closely taken the very important role on the humanitarian citizens and the disaster relief. We want to be the best members of international society to do our responsibility and application. I would like to express our sincerest appreciation to The American Legion. Thank you for always supporting us. In turn, for arms procurement and political and the foreign affairs and the economic and trade issue, that kind of friendship would not be forgotten. (Applause)

Thank you. Before I leave the podium, I would like to present traditional Chinese souvenir as well as on behalf of our new female president of ROC, to present the Order of Resplendent Banner with Cravat for his dedication and achievement, and I would like to ask my colleague Colonel Wang to announce the citation, the honor goes to National Commander Barnett. (Applause)

COLONEL WANG: Certificate of Award: To accompany the award of the Order of the Resplendent Banner with Cravat, to Mr. Harold D. Barnett, national commander, The American Legion, in recognition of his significant contribution to the promotion of friendship and military cooperation between the Republic of China and the United States of America. The Order of Resplendent Banner with Cravat is hereby awarded on the date of the 30th of August in the year of 2016. (Applause)

It's from the National Palace Museum, we prepared that from there. This is a replicate pendant from our Ming Dynasty. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Before you leave, I'm going to go back with you for some more discussions. They showed me an incredible time in Taiwan, the culture and heritage and the progressive nature of their veterans rehabilitation, their VA hospital. It was an exciting experience, a very informative experience and one of partnership. I'd like to present both of you a medallion from The American Legion. And let's give our friends and partners in mutual support, the Republic of China, Taiwan. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: The son of a World War II Navy veteran, our next guest served the State of Georgia for 34 years in risk management. He is also a member of the Sons of the American Legion Squadron 51, College Park, Georgia. He now leads an organization that is composed entirely of the descendants of patriots who served in the American Revolution. He is a member of numerous hereditary societies, including Washington’s Descendants at Valley Forge. Please welcome the leader of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, President General J. Michael Tomme, Sr. (Applause)
Greetings: Mike Tomme, President General
National Society of Sons of American Revolution

Good afternoon. Commander Dale Barnett, distinguished guests, Legionnaires, members of the Ladies Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion. I am also a Son of The American Legion, Squad 51, College Park, Georgia.

As president general of the Sons of the American Revolution, it's a privilege and an honor to extend greetings from our 34,000-plus members whose patriots ancestors were the first veterans to give us freedom that we enjoy today. We are the largest male lineage organization in the United States, consisting of more than 500-plus chapters and several international societies in the United States. Our members are male descendants of people who served or gave aid during the year 1775 to 1783 during the American Revolution. We are dedicated to perpetuating the American ideals, traditions and protecting the Constitution.

I am a proud son of a Navy World War II veteran. My father served on a ship that was involved in the testing of the atomic bomb toward the end of the war. Just as many World War II veterans are reluctant to talk about their war experience, that was my dad as well, as he would never talk about his time in World War II. Just as I'm proud of my father, my wife, who is with me today, is also proud of her father, too. He served in World War II in the Army as a member of the 86th Infantry Division nicknamed Black Hawk Division, and he saw service in France, Germany and the Philippines. My family also experienced loss of a loved one due to the war. My uncle, Sergeant William Arthur McCluskey, United States Marines, lost his life in the Southwest Pacific area during World War II.

Just as we are proud of our own families, we are proud of each and every one of you. We proudly pay tribute to each and every one of you who left your homes to travel to a world far away from everything that you knew and everyone that you loved. You answered the call of duty with courage and valor, whether it was in the jungles, the rice paddies or the heat of the desert or on a cold night, you fought heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans. Through combat, over air, land and sea, you proud Americans upheld the highest traditions of our Armed Forces. In the hearts of all Americans, we're always forever grateful for your service, valor, sacrifices, and for this we say thank you.

Now it's my pleasure to make a special presentation to National Commander Dale Barnett. Commander Barnett, in recognition of your accomplishments as a patriotic leader of this nation, it is an honor and pleasure to present to you on behalf of the National Society Sons of the American Revolution, the Distinguished Patriot Award. This award is presented only once during the tenure of a president general. It is presented to an American citizen for outstanding service and patriotism to our country. Thank you, sir, for your leadership and your service. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: On behalf of Commander Barnett, I'd like to present to you one of the commander's medallions and appreciate your participation. (Applause) At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: Next, for the purposes of a presentation, I would like to call on a group of Legionnaires who do not know the meaning of “disabled.” They are “Re-Abled.” And they have proven it by reaching the highest mountain peaks on earth. The team is called Summit for Soldiers, and they are based here in Ohio. With us today are co-founder C. Michael Fairman, Richard Amaroso, Allen Diamond, Steve Downey, Andrew Oakes, Anna Pelino, and Dietrich Stallsworth.
Commander Barnett, Legionnaires, distinguished guests, visitors, there is an epidemic that's been raging across this country for many, many years, and it's called veteran suicide. We lose almost 8,000 veterans a year to this epidemic.

In 2012, I tried to take my life. This past spring, 19 May 2016, I carried this flag bearing the names of those we've known and lost to suicide, along with my message, to the top of the world to show that you can reclaim your life and take on any obstacle that gets in your way.

In my quest, I was privileged and honored to have along with me our SFS American Legion team that's standing behind me here, who not only got the opportunity to trek into base camp through the Himalayas, but their more important mission of taking tents and supplies to an earthquake-stricken school district in Nepal, showing you what a group of re-abled veterans can do. (Applause)

And I tell you, all of this was made possible by Tom Simons and the Ohio American Legion who saw our vision and got behind our grassroots efforts to reach out to other struggling veterans through our adventure program. There it is. Let me tell you something. At the end of the day, their trek, my climb, this is just a wonderful by-product of what's going on right here in our local communities, not just through our Summit for Soldier programs, but through Legion posts across this country.

You know, at Summit for Soldiers, our outreach, our vision, our mission is driven by an internal passion that are about issues that are very close to our heart, but as Legionnaires, we are proud to be a part of helping to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship through our devotion to mutual helpfulness. (Applause)

And we don't take that line lightly. Our program is all about that camaraderie. It's about staying connected after we get out of the service, and that's how we're going to save lives. You know, we were extremely proud to have had the honor and privilege of wearing The American Legion patch on our quest to Mt. Everest, and we hope that this will be an example to other veterans to just reach out their hand and we'll grab it. Thank you. (Applause)

Commander Barnett. Sir, on behalf of our team, we would like to present to you this patch which we wore to the summit of Mt. Everest, along with a little plaque. And may it come to represent hope and encouragement to all veterans to come, sir.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you. You've made us so proud, all of you. On behalf of The American Legion, I'd like to present all of these fine Americans who represent the very best, thank you for what you've done to raise awareness for veterans across this nation. God bless each and every one of you. I'd love to present to you our medallion from The American Legion.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

National Commander’s Report to Convention
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

My fellow Legionnaires, Legion Family members, and friends, many national commanders have stood before you and thanked you for a wonderful ride. For me, I want to thank you for a wonderful walk. When I asked for your support in conducting Awareness Walks for Veterans, I had no idea that by the end of my term as national commander I would have participated in 43 of them in 34 different states. (Applause)

But even better, some departments held walks without me. I say even better because the Walks are not about me. They are about you, The American Legion Family. They are
about the great young people, many of you seen in the video, of this country, and they're about our military. The bravery that they show in defending us and the struggles some have when they return. Like I said in the video, each honk of the horn is a potential member. When motorists and spectators see the American Flag, a veterans cap and The American Legion Emblem, they like to show their support. When I was in the Iowa State Fair a couple weeks ago, there was about 100,000 of them that cheered us on on that awareness walk.

It is up to us all to transfer that support into American Legion Family membership and opportunities to serve our nation. We are a strong organization and a very strong family, but we could be stronger. Numbers do matter. And we can get those numbers, as I addressed the Membership Committee in August, with the three "P's." People, planning, and passion. You will hear more about this during the membership report tomorrow. But keep in mind that everything you hear over the next three days about our programs, activities, and issue advocacy is entirely based on our membership. We need The American Legion to stand strong against voices in Washington that wish to close the VA and outsource the responsibility of caring for veterans to the private sector. And we're going to stand strong and say no. (Applause)

It wasn't the private sector that sent our veterans to war, it was Uncle Sam. A recent report from the Rand Corporation confirmed what we knew. VA care is equal to or, in many categories, better than private sector care. At the same time, though, we know that VA has some very serious problems that need correcting. I spoke out loudly against VA executives abusing an overly generous relocation allowance system, and The American Legion stood alone as a veterans service organization two years ago in boldly calling for the resignation of the former VA secretary. We need to insist that VA hold its poor performers accountable and fire those who fail to serve veterans with respect. (Applause)

But you can't fire your way out of a problem, and you can't call firing "reform" without addressing the root causes. While we welcome positive reforms, our sole criteria in supporting any legislation is whether or not it is good for veterans. We do know that modernizing the appeals process would be very good for veterans. More than 1.4 million claims for disabilities were processed last year alone. But with 10 to 12 percent of the claims being appealed, the lengthy wait times and workload continue to increase and may never disappear. We will work with VA, we will work with Congress, and we will remedy these problems.

We also insist that members of our military be given the resources that they need to succeed and the quality of life that they need to flourish. We have an all-volunteer force, and we must provide attractive and stable career opportunities if we want to recruit the high-quality young people that we need in today’s competitive marketplace. We need to stand with our troops who every day put their lives on the line to protect us all.

It was very alarming for me to visit the troops in Europe and to learn that they have endured a 75 percent reduction in active duty manpower since I transitioned from there in the 1990s. Attacks against the United States and our allies are happening with greater frequency and lethality. “Peace through Strength” is not just a bumper sticker. It is a moral responsibility.

We have a responsibility to keep America strong for another pillar of the American people. Our young people. I had the pleasure to meet a young nine-year-old, Alan Landers of St. Petersburg, Florida. And, Florida, I want to hear from you. (Cheers and applause)

Before I started my walks, Alan started a Superheroes Fun Run in Pinellas Park. He wanted to raise money so that World War II veterans could attend Honor Flights and see the national memorials in Washington. When I visited with Alan this year, he had raised over $30,000 in three years. (Applause)

His next fundraiser will be October 8 in Dunedin, Florida. If you're anywhere close to there, join the Department of Florida in a great event. Ladies and gentlemen, that is what young people in this country are capable of, and I'm proud of Alan. And Alan is a member of the Sons of The American Legion. He's our future. (Applause)
I'm so proud of the history of The American Legion Family. On Veterans Day, I was invited to the White House. But something told me that I belonged somewhere else. So I asked National Vice Commander David Gough to represent me at the White House, and I joined the Department of Alabama as we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. We hear so much about the shameful times in Selma. When African Americans couldn’t vote and civil rights workers were beaten. But I was also able to see an important part of American Legion and our history and impact on that city. The story of 1926, The American Legion took the KKK to task. Because in the Selma Cemetery, there was a World War I memorial, but a few names were left off the memorial. They were the names of those that had died that were of color. But The American Legion said, "This is wrong. A veteran is a veteran." (Applause)

They took the Klan to court, and we won. Those names were added to the memorial that today is the centerpiece of the Selma Cemetery. Fast-forward to another generation, to World War II, when The American Legion drafted the greatest piece of social legislation ever passed, the GI Bill, but many in Congress wanted to oppose giving equal educational benefits to black veterans. We insisted otherwise. And, again, we prevailed. (Applause)

This year, on June 22, it was an honor to unveil the Harry Colmery Memorial in Topeka, Kansas, a memorial to The American Legion and our past national commander who wrote that GI Bill, and he was honored with several American Legion Family members there as one of the 13 greatest Kansans on that very warm day in Topeka, Kansas.

But more recently, and, again, we were told that a new 9/11 GI Bill would cause mid-grade troops to exit the military in droves so they could use their benefits. We insisted that it pass because it was the right thing to do, and it did pass because of The American Legion. (Applause)

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, America needs The American Legion. As people, we have shown a willingness to die for our country if called. We not only represent the conscience of America, but we are often the heartbeat of our communities. We are the ones organizing homecomings, conducting blood donation drives, hosting job fairs, and speaking to schoolchildren every day. We are the guardians of our nation’s flag, the honor guard at funerals, and a sympathetic ear for our wounded warriors wanting to discuss the horrors of war with people who understand. We are the baseball coaches, the Boys and Girls State counselors and the scoutmasters. This is why we walk for veterans, not only to honor their service, but to remind people of the programs and camaraderie that we offer.

An estimated 20 veterans a day commit suicide, and The American Legion message is not one more should die. Pills are not the solution; pals are. The American Legion does not oppose medication, but we certainly are against overmedication simply because healthcare providers are too busy to actually solve the problem. (Applause)

And that’s perhaps the most valuable service we can offer a veteran, to be their friend, to just listen, to relate, to support, and to defend. We are the advocates for alternative therapies, better treatment for traumatic brain injuries, and for state-of-the-art prosthetics. We are the voice for veterans who are sometimes unable to speak for themselves. That includes veterans who may be down on their luck or living in the streets.

The VA has made great progress in cutting veterans homelessness. But, if you recall, the promise was made to this convention seven years ago that it would be eliminated. Progress has been made, but a focus should remain on the issue. There are many factors at play, but The American Legion will not be satisfied with the status quo until every veteran can obtain a decent job and have safe and comfortable housing. (Applause)

Some of our brothers and sisters-in-arms have made mistakes. Serious ones. But I couldn't help but be impressed by the commitment shown by Legionnaires and the Sons of The American Legion members that I recently visited at the Pendleton maximum security correctional facility in Indiana. They conducted by-the-book meetings and had highly successful fundraisers, supporting great causes such as the Special Olympics, and on my visit presented a check for $2,700 to the National Emergency Fund. Pretty
incredible. (Applause)

The enthusiasm that they showed for The American Legion was inspiring to all of us that visited that day that facility. And when we walked out that prison gate, it made all of us appreciate the freedoms that the rest of us in society can enjoy. But that freedom did not come cheap. It is available to us only because previous generations of veterans have died for it.

The American Legion has completed almost a century of service to our nation. We are a beloved institution. That is because the American people know that we stand for something. We stand for what is good about America. We stand for our military. We stand for our veterans. We stand for our youth. But we also have a pillar called Americanism, and in all the discussions we hear between the major political candidates, we don't hear many people discussing the need to protect Old Glory from desecration. Opponents tell us it's a rare occurrence. I have to wonder if they are watching the same newscasts and are viewing the same websites that I have seen. And if that's a rare occurrence, then why are they opposed to the amendment that would affect such a small group of people. Our resolution has not changed. Our resolve has not changed. Congress needs to pass the Flag amendment now! We have waited long enough! (Applause)

And nothing epitomizes Americanism like the right to vote. People have died so that we could have that privilege. We are not partisans in The American Legion; we are patriots. Regardless of who you vote for, please don’t take the right for granted. And you can never go wrong if you base that vote on the four pillars of The American Legion. (Applause)

When you elected me as your national commander, I challenged you to dedicate yourselves to the principles of duty, honor, country. After touring all of our departments inside and outside the United States, I want to thank you. You are accomplishing that mission. You are making every day count. God bless all of you. Thank you very much for a great year. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you all for that very warm response. Our next guest is president and CEO of Fifth Third Bancorp, and our next guest oversees the strategic direction of the diversified financial services company, which is headquartered right here in Cincinnati. He graduated from the University of Dayton with a bachelor’s degree in computer science and earned a master’s degree from Central Michigan University. He joined Fifth Third in 2003. Please welcome Greg D. Carmichael. (Applause)

Presentation: Greg D. Carmichael
President & CEO, Fifth Third Bancorp

Thank you, National Commander Barnett. On behalf of Fifth Third Bank and our 18,000 employees, which includes over 400 veterans, it is my pleasure to present this check for $10,000 to The American Legion as a contribution to the National Emergency Fund. (Applause)

This is the final installment of a five-year pledge made by Fifth Third to the fund. We have been honored to support your work with the veterans and their families, and I am personally proud to be associated with The American Legion. (Applause)

I would like to thank all the men and women, both active duty and veterans, who protect our great nation and allow us to enjoy the freedoms that we have today. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Greg, I want to thank you. As you know, we have a strong partnership with Fifth Third Corporation. We thank you for your very generous donation. We thank you for the support you give us each and every day. I'd like to present to you one of our medallions. Thank you for your service. Thank you for what you do. (Applause)
I now call on National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler of the Department of Virginia to issue the Call for Convention.

Call for Convention
Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia, National Adjutant

By the authority of the National Executive Committee, the 98th Annual National Convention of The American Legion is hereby called to meet in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30-September 1, 2016. The convention business sessions will be held in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Exhibit Hall A (1st floor).

Purpose
The annual national convention is the legislative body of The American Legion. The convention is called for the purpose of setting the programs of The American Legion for the ensuing year, amending the national constitution and by-laws, and transacting such other business as may be brought before it.

On Thursday, September 1, 2016, at twelve o’clock (noon) of the final session, or at the conclusion of all other business of the national convention, whichever first occurs, officers for the ensuing year will be elected, these being the national commander and five national vice commanders, in that sequence.

Representation
Representation in the convention shall be by department, and in accordance with the provisions of the national constitution (sec. 3, art. V):

“… each department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the national treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said convention (August 1, 2016) and whose registration fees, as fixed by the national executive committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid; and to one alternate for each delegate.”

In addition to the above, the members of the national executive committee are delegates to the national convention with vote, which shall be exercised with their respective departments except that the vote of the national commander shall be exercised only in his capacity as chairman of the national convention. (sec. 3, art. VII)

“Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote.” (sec. 4, art. V)

Delegates to the national convention shall be accredited in writing to the national adjutant in the number and manner prescribed by article V, VI and VII, national constitution. The rights of departments to make and accredit substitutes for absentee delegates or alternate delegates shall be recognized by the national adjutant, provided that such substitution shall be officially certified by the department commander and department adjutant at the time of the certification required by the national constitution or at any time prior to adjournment of the first session of the national convention.

Alternates
Alternates shall have the power to vote only in the absence of the regular delegates. The selection of alternates to represent absent delegates is a matter for decision within the respective delegations.

The vote of any registered delegates absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from his/her department.

National Executive Committee
A meeting of the new national executive committee will be held at the call of the national commander within twenty-four hours after the adjournment of the national convention, as provided by the national bylaws.
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Department Officials

Department officials, unless elected as delegates or alternates to the national convention, have no privileges in the convention except as the guests of their respective delegations.

Convention Committees

Americanism, one delegate per department. Children & Youth, one delegate per department. Constitutional Amendments, one delegate per department. Credentials & Rules, one delegate per department.

Finance, one delegate per department. Legislation, one delegate per department.

Internal Affairs — Other Internal Matters, one delegate per department; Membership, one delegate per department

National Security — Aerospace, one delegate per department; Conventional Armed Forces, one delegate per department; Foreign Relations, one delegate per department; Law and Order & Homeland Security, one delegate per department; Military Benefits & Quality of Life, one delegate per department; National Guard & Reserve Forces, one delegate per department; Unconventional Forces & Intelligence, one delegate per department.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation — Health Administration, one delegate per department; National Cemetery, one delegate per department; Veterans Benefits, one delegate per department.

Veterans Employment & Education — Employment & Veterans Preference, one delegate per department; Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness, one delegate per department

Signed by Harold D. Barnett, National Commander; attested by Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, that completes the call.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you very much, Mr. Adjutant. I now declare the 98th Annual National Convention of The American Legion to be regularly convened. (Applause)

The Chair recognizes George West, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Credentials & Rules

George West, New Hampshire, Chairman

Mr. Commander and my fellow delegates: There were thirty eight delegates to the Committee on Credentials and Rules which met at 8:30 a.m., August 28, 2016, in the Millennium Hotel, Grand Ballroom A.

George West (NH) was elected Chairman, and C. W. Sparks (TX) was elected Secretary.

The Committee proceeded to the business agenda by considering the Rules of the Convention. A motion was unanimously approved by the Committee to adopt the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the Uniform Code of Procedures for Organizing National Conventions of The American Legion which approved the revised edition of October 2015.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried to accept the Delegate Strength Report as reported by the National Adjutant certifying membership 30 days prior to National Convention which is based upon the provisions of Section 3, Article V, of the National Constitution which the National Adjutant just stated in the Call for Convention.

In accordance with the membership report certified to the Convention Committee on Credentials and Internal Affairs by the National Adjutant on August 1, 2016, and in accordance with Article V of the National Constitution, the voting strength of the 55
Departments is 2,399 plus the National Commander for a total of 2,400 delegates to the National Convention allocated as follows:

Alabama ...................................... 27  Montana ........................................... 18
Alaska ........................................... 13  Nebraska ......................................... 41
Arizona ......................................... 51  Nevada ............................................. 15
Arkansas ....................................... 22  New Hampshire .................................. 24
California .....................................109  New Jersey ....................................... 55
Colorado ....................................... 31  New Mexico ...................................... 18
Connecticut ................................... 27  New York ......................................... 124
Delaware ....................................... 17  North Carolina .................................. 50
Dist. of Col. ................................... 8  North Dakota .................................... 21
Florida .........................................133  Ohio ..................................................110
France .......................................... 9  Oklahoma .......................................... 26
Georgia ......................................... 56  Oregon .............................................. 26
Hawaii ........................................... 9  Pennsylvania .................................... 175
Idaho .......................................... 17  Philippines ....................................... 7
Illinois .......................................... 99  Puerto Rico .......................................10
Indiana ......................................... 94  Rhode Island ..................................... 11
Iowa .............................................. 55  South Carolina .................................. 29
Kansas .......................................... 38  South Dakota .................................... 27
Kentucky ........................................ 30  Tennessee ........................................ 34
Louisiana ....................................... 30  Texas ............................................... 83
Maine ........................................... 28  Utah ............................................... 14
Maryland ....................................... 63  Vermont ............................................ 18
Massachusetts .................................. 47  Virginia .......................................... 58
Mexico ..........................................  7  Washington ....................................... 36
Michigan ....................................... 82  West Virginia .................................... 25
Minnesota ....................................... 89  Wisconsin ........................................ 68
Mississippi ..................................... 21  Wyoming .......................................... 13
Missouri ........................................ 51

The Credentials and Rules Committee did not receive any resolutions for consideration or action.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Committee Chairman and Secretary be authorized to sign the report on behalf of the Committee.

Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate from the department of New Hampshire, I move that the Report of the Convention Committee on Credential and Rules — to include the afore-mentioned Delegate Strength Report — and the adoption of the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the Uniform Code of Procedures for Organizing National Conventions of The American Legion be approved.

Thank you Mr. Commander for allowing me the time to make my report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: There is a motion on the floor. Do I hear a second? ... Second. Is there any discussion? All in favor of approving the report signify by saying aye. All opposed say nay. Motion carries. The report of Credentials and Rules is adopted.


The Chair now recognizes Gaither Keener of the Department of North Carolina, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Finance, for the purposes of making a report.
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Report: Convention Committee on Finance
Gaither M. Kenner, Jr., Chairman

Forty members met at the Hyatt Regency in the Buckeye meeting room at 9 a.m. on Sunday, August 28, 2016, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Shawn Long, CPA (Indiana), National Finance Director, opened the meeting as staff liaison and informed the committee that nominations were in order for Chairman and Secretary. Gaither M. Keener, Jr. (North Carolina) was elected chairman, and Carl E. Levi (Tennessee) was elected secretary, by unanimous vote.

David Warnken (Kansas) made a motion to empower the secretary to deliver the report if the chairman was unable. The motion was seconded by Thomas Mattice (Idaho) and passed by unanimous vote.

Reports were received from Kenneth Danilson (Iowa) Chairman of the Marketing Commission and Walter Ivie (Texas) Chairman of the Media and Communications Commission.

Chairman Keener reported that the 2015 consolidated financial statements were audited by Crowe Horwath, LLP who issued an unqualified opinion.

The Chairman then introduced the National Treasurer, George A. Buskirk, Jr. (Indiana), who updated the committee on the economy. Treasurer Buskirk completed his report with a recommendation for national per capita to remain $18.50. Paul Morin (Massachusetts) made a motion to keep dues at $18.50. The motion was seconded by George Lussier (Virginia) and adopted by unanimous vote.

Chairman Keener finally introduced Shawn Long, CPA (Indiana) to report on the financial position and activities of the National organization.

Alan Lennox (California) moved to empower the Chairman and Secretary to write and/or amend the report on behalf of the Convention Committee on Finance. Ron Price (South Carolina) seconded the motion, which was adopted by unanimous vote.

As being no further business, the meeting recessed at 9:45 a.m.

CHAIRMAN KEENER: Commander, that's my report. I make a motion my report be accepted and placed in the minutes of the convention. ... Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion, and I've heard a second. Is there any discussion? All in favor, please indicate by the usual sign. All opposed? The report is adopted.

When groups like the ACLU and other secular organizations target veterans memorials, The American Legion understood that, if we wanted to defend both God and country, we would need friends like the First Liberty Institute.

The legal scholars there specialize in religious liberty cases. Our next speaker has been named one of the 25 greatest Texas lawyers of the last quarter century by Texas Lawyer magazine. He is a frequent guest on The O'Reilly Factor, Fox & Friends, Good Morning America, and The Today Show. He has been president and CEO of the First Liberty Institute since 1997. Last year he presented his organization's first Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., Religious Liberty Award to the man for whom it's named, our very own national judge advocate. (Applause)

Today he is to present the award to another deserving recipient. Please give a warm American Legion welcome to Kelly Shackelford, Esquire.

Presentation: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award
Kelly Shackelford, President & CEO, First Liberty Institute

When our veterans memorials have come under attack, we've been honored to stand with The American Legion in defending the attacks against those memorials, and I'm proud
to say we've won every single one of those who have come to conclusion protecting those memorials. *(Applause)*

When the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial came under attack, the Legion stood with First Liberty Institute, and, again, I'm proud to announce today that that memorial, that incredible memorial outside of San Diego, is going to continue to stand as it has for these many, many decades. *(Applause)*

When the Mojave Desert Veterans Memorial cross came under attack, and, actually, the federal district court and court of appeals ordered that it be torn down, despite being up for over 70 years, The American Legion joined First Liberty Institute, and we took this all the way to the Supreme Court and got a reversal, and that memorial still stands to this day and will continue to stand. *(Applause)*

When the Bladensburg memorial, which is one of the oldest World War I memorials we have in this country, came under attack, The American Legion and First Liberty Institute went to defend it. And I'm proud to say that the federal district court has ruled in our favor, and now we're preparing for an appeal and the arguments at the federal court of appeals, and we are going to continue to fight to make sure and preserve and protect that memorial. It's a wonderful memorial, the Bladensburg memorial, which I think you can see a copy of. *(Applause)*

When lawsuits were filed against our national motto, "In God We Trust," and against "under God" in our pledge, The American Legion joined with First Liberty Institute in order for us to stand to make sure and preserve the national motto, as crazy as that sounds, that we're having to defend that in court and "under God" in our pledge. And, again, we've been successful in every one of these to this point.

So I thought a good way to start would be look at this little video we'll show. It's only a couple of minutes. It will show you these memorials, and it will also show you the award we're about to give, the Philip B. Onderdonk Award for Religious Freedom.

*... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. *(Applause)*

As you see the website, firstliberty.org, feel free to go there later and look at the videos about these different cases. I think you'll be proud of what The American Legion has done. Also, what an incredible award to give. We cannot thank enough Henry Repeating Arms for donating this rifle every year because of their commitment to The American Legion and to religious freedom. *(Applause)*

Each time we've been in these battles, there's somebody that's been with us that's approved The American Legion doing so, that stood with us every step of the way. So I think it's only appropriate that the Philip B. Onderdonk Jr. Award go to the Legion's own Dan Wheeler, national adjutant. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: I'll have to admit, I was doing something else when they called my name. I am surprised and honored and humbled. I generally think of Phil as a pain in the butt coming in and asking for all these amicus things. I didn't know I'd end up getting awarded a prestigious award like this for telling him yes. I thank you very much and hope you keep on doing the stuff that you do for America's veterans and their memories.

MR. KELLY SHACKELFORD: Thank you very much.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Kelly, thank you again on behalf of The American Legion for standing up for our religious freedoms across the country. And I want to present to you a medallion from The American Legion. And let's give Kelly another big hand for what he does protecting our freedoms. *(Applause)*

Our next guest is an Arizona-based physician and medical scientist who practices internal medicine and psychiatry. She serves as site principal investigator for the only FDA-approved randomized and controlled trial examining the efficacy of marijuana to treat PTSD in combat veterans. I know it's not on your agenda, but she was so dedicated, she said: If you could fit me in anytime in three days, I would like just a short time to address
this issue. She is on the faculty of Colorado State University and helped organize the Colorado State University "Cannabis Center of Excellence." Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Dr. Sue Sisley.

Address: Dr. Sue Sisley

Well, I am most honored and humbled to be addressing this renowned organization. I wanted to just give you a glimpse of what we're trying to do. I was invited to speak today because I'm the principal investigator on an FDA-approved clinical trial looking at whole plant cannabis for military veterans that have treatment-resistant PTSD.

And you can see here we're going to be looking at 76 military veterans in the Phoenix and Baltimore area. And we're going to be using federal government cannabis. We have all of these prestigious partners who are collaborating with us now, Johns Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania.

A little bit about me. As he said, I've been a physician now for 20 years now. I live in Arizona. I practice internal medicine and psychiatry there. I think it's important to emphasize that I've never personally used cannabis. I'm not part of the industry. I don't own any dispensaries, and I don't prescribe cannabis. I'm strictly focused on the research.

I worked at the VA for a number of years, but I joined the faculty at the U of A College of Medicine where I was in excellent standing until I became the principal investigator on the most controversial research happening at that medical school. And unfortunately that put me at odds with a president who didn't value this work, and ultimately both me and my research were terminated.

We were lucky to have all kinds of physicians from all over the country who condemned that decision, who wrote open letters to the media talking about how science is being shackled by politics. But ultimately we went on to receive a tremendous amount of worldwide media coverage about the barriers to cannabis research in this country.

We persevered and opened our own research institute in Scottsdale, which has now received a $2 million grant from the Colorado Health Department to continue to try to do this work, looking at the efficacy of cannabis in military veterans with PTSD.

But here are the other areas that we've also been funded to study. So we're looking at cannabis for everything from cannabis for pediatric brain tumors; cannabis for pediatric epilepsy; cannabis for Parkinson's, and over the next few years, thanks to the awards from the state of Colorado, you're going to see objective data in all of these different areas, which is going to be really valuable.

I can tell you that the reason we're fighting so hard for this study is because this would be the first and only randomized controlled trial in the world looking at cannabis for PTSD, and we've been really lucky, after seven years of struggle, we've now gone on to receive a DEA Schedule 1 license. And this is what they look like, if you haven't seen it. The Drug Enforcement Agency issues this. The scientists call it the "Golden Ticket" because it allows me to now purchase cannabis from the federal government.

Here's a picture of what that cannabis looks like. These are some rolled cigarettes that we've dumped out the contents so you can see this is a very sad version of cannabis study drug. But here, just recently, we received a new batch of cannabis for this current clinical trial. And many of you probably thought this would arrive in an armored truck; but, no, four kilos of cannabis arrived at our lab by FedEx. (Laughter)

This delivery man had no idea he was transporting marijuana. We brought out the Ziploc bags that had the cannabis and tried to dump it out so we could you get a glimpse. They basically pulverize it into a green powder, and this is it. So we're looking for new sources of study drug. And we're hoping that eventually we'll be able to work with other expert growers around the country.

A brief history of cannabis in this country. Here's the summary. Basically this was medicine. Centuries ago this has always been viewed as medicine. Then it became illegal
and vilified, and then it's now again being examined as a medicine. But I wanted to just point out something that I think is really important, is that our pharmacopeia, back in the 1800s, which is basically the nation's formulary, even back then in the 1800s, they acknowledged the therapeutic benefit of cannabis for alcoholism, for treating opioid dependence and opioid addiction. You can see the myriad of medical conditions they already sensed that cannabis would be valuable to treat.

So the reason I got involved in this was because of the veterans in my practice. I've been treating vets now for 20 years, and many of them have been reporting to me that they were getting benefit from this plant, but I was highly skeptical. And I still am. I only covet meds that are put through the FDA drug development process. And that's why I'm fighting so hard for this type of research in this area.

You can see here, these are the symptoms that these veterans were reporting, that seemed to be getting relief in these different symptom areas. And so I felt strongly that we needed to move forward to develop clinical trials. I became acutely aware of the problems of veteran suicide in my own practice, because I've lost so many vets to suicide.

Finally this data came out from the VA a couple of years ago, which has now been updated recently. The number, 20 vets a day that kill themselves in this country, is probably a falsely low estimate, but it's still a horrific number.

And I think that we have a duty to try to uncover new treatments for PTSD. These are the only two medications on the market that have an FDA indication to treat PTSD. That's all we have, is Zoloft and Paxil. And the media has been a big ally for us in helping us point out the fact that these meds are often ineffective. They often are no better than placebo. And here this is a presentation that I gave at Walter Reed Hospital last year where we were invited to present about two hours of cannabis curriculum to these military docs from all over the country.

And I showed them, I said: Look what happens when Zoloft and Paxil don't work. I'm allowed to utilize all of these other untested meds to treat their PTSD. So I'm allowed to use all the antidepressants from any class of antidepressant. I'm allowed to use all the sleep meds. None of these have been tested for PTSD. But they're all fair game. All of the bipolar medicines. All the anti-convulsants and all the antipsychotics. I mean, this list is crazy how long this is. And all of these, nobody would criticize me for using any of these meds. And you can see why veterans start feeling like guinea pigs, why they end up being just put through the gauntlet of all of these meds and feeling completely nonfunctional.

We're becoming the prescription overdose capital of the planet now. We're losing a human life every 19 minutes to prescription drug overdose, but in the veterans community, it's even more severe. 33 percent higher rate of prescription drug overdose among our vets, and we've got to do something about this.

We're really fortunate to have a peer-reviewed journal article in JAMA last year that really kind of shed light on the fact that cannabis may be substitution therapy for opioids. You can see in this article, in the 23 medical cannabis states around the U.S., that they noticed a significant drop in the opioid overdose deaths in those states. So clearly patients are starting to choose cannabis over much more addictive meds.

I wanted to also mention there are other countries that have already acknowledged the medical benefits of cannabis for their veterans. For instance, Israel for many years has been providing safe legal access to lab-tested cannabis for their veterans, and not only making it available, but also fully subsidizing the costs for their veteran community. The same thing in Canada. We have a group of veterans there called Marijuana for Trauma, and these guys, really a dynamic group of vets that are trying to help bring awareness about the potential of cannabis as an alternative treatment to much more addictive meds.

We're also seeing a number of really charismatic veteran groups here in the U.S. Groups like the Battlefield Foundation here in the audience today that are trying to work on the same agenda, trying to help build awareness about veterans suicide and the potential,
they're trying to raise money for cannabis research to try to collect objective data about how cannabis might work as substitution therapy for opioids.

So I wanted to leave you with this picture. This is an illustration from a veteran who depicted his experience returning from service being pummeled with all these prescription meds. Here he's drowning in pills and pill bottles and suddenly he discovers a rolled cannabis cigarette and finds it lifesaving.

I can't even explain the number of veterans in my practice who have reported that this natural plant has saved their life. And I think we owe it to these veterans to study this plant in a rigorous and controlled environment, and that's why I really am most grateful to The American Legion for their willingness to examine the need to end the barriers to this kind of research and help collect quality science in this area. So I thank you all for the kind invitation to address this illustrious body, and God bless all of you and God bless the U.S.A. Thank you all. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: At this time the Chair recognizes Ralph Bozella of Colorado, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Ralph P. Bozella, Colorado, Chairman

One hundred seven (107) members of your Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation met at 9:00 a.m. on August 28, 2016, in Duke Energy Convention Center, Rooms 201 & 204, Second Floor, Cincinnati, Ohio which is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Committee was called to order by Louis Celli (MA), Liaison Representative appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman. Zack Hearn (PA), Deputy Director for Claims, VA&R Commission, acted as temporary secretary and called the roll. A quorum being present, nominations were received for permanent chairman. Ralph P. Bozella (CO), Chairman of the Standing National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, was unanimously elected Chairman of the Convention Committee.

Exercising the authority granted to him, the Chairman accepted nominations for secretary to the Convention Committee. Kelly Ackerman (MT) was voted as Committee Secretary. During their breakout sessions the subcommittees elected William J. Smith (PA) Chairman of the Claims and Rating Subcommittee and, Patrick Rourk (NY) as Secretary; Phil Youngblood (GA), Chairman of the Health Administration Committee, and James Stanko (CO) as Secretary; Richard Neville (NC) Chairman of the National Cemetery Committee, and Jack Stanley (FL) Secretary.

Subcommittee liaison assignments were as follows: Louis Celli (MA), Director, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division and Zachary Hearn (PA), Deputy Director for Claims to Benefits Administration and Roscoe Butler (MD), Deputy Director for Health Policy to Health Administration and Gerardo Avila (DC), Deputy Director MEB/PEB to National Cemetery.

Historically a Special Department Service Officers Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Resolutions, in a preconvention meeting, screened and grouped the resolutions. A report of their action, with recommendations, was presented to the Convention Committee for consideration.

The Screening Committee conserved the time of the Convention Committee substantially. It was chaired by Ralph P. Bozella, Chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission and was composed of the following Department Service Officers:
The Convention Committee recommended that such a Committee be appointed for this purpose to serve the Ninety-Eighth National Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.

The 151 Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation resolutions presented for the consideration of this Convention were referred by the Resolutions Assignment Committee. The following actions on the resolutions were taken by the Convention Committee:

- Approved or Approved w/Amendment ................................................... 130
- Consolidated with Resolutions Approved ................................................... 7
- Referred to the Standing Commission ........................................................ 5
- Received and Recorded .............................................................................. 3
- Rejected ...................................................................................................... 6

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committee’s behalf.

A report of action taken on the (5) resolutions referred to the Standing National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the Adjutant of the Department concerned.

### Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment

**Resolution No. 1: Department of Veterans Affairs Quadrennial Plan for Budget**

**Origin: Alaska**

**Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation**

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always believed in the quality of care that our nation’s veterans are receiving at VA medical centers throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion remains committed to assuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care delivery system continues to perform as the role model for the health care industry in both the public and private sector; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion opposes any effort through the administration, members of Congress or VA proposal, policy, or law to reduce VA’s budget due to sequestration; and

WHEREAS, Recent legislation has introduced the use of a “Future-Years Veterans Program,” which would be similar to the budget, but would also cover expected expenses over a five-year period; and

WHEREAS, The VA needs a robust budget for the purpose of providing the veterans of all wars the proper health care needs and benefits they need during a difficult fiscal time in the country; and

WHEREAS, With better tools to see the discrepancies, Congress will also be able to recognize shortfalls and help adjust VA’s budget upwards when critical goals are in danger of not being met; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation that would require Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit annually to Congress a future-years veterans program reflecting expenditures and proposed appropriations included in the budget for that fiscal year; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The VA conduct a quadrennial review of the strategy for meeting the commitment of our nation’s veterans and the resources necessary to meet that commitment.

Resolution No. 2: Reinstatet Enrollment of Priority Group 8g Veterans into the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Patient Enrollment System

Origin: Alaska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 382 (VA&R))

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code, section 101, defines a veteran as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released there from under conditions other than dishonorable; and
WHEREAS, The VA Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, Public Law 104-262, required the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish an annual patient enrollment system and created 7 distinct priority groups; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 104-262, further required the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to manage the enrollment of veterans in accordance with the 7 priority groups; and
WHEREAS, On January 23, 2002, Congress enacted Public Law 107-135, the VA Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001, which created an additional priority group, priority group 8; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 104-262, further established a Geographic Means Test (GMT), which is based on a veteran’s family annual household income, utilizing the income guidelines established by the Department of Housing and Urban Development low income criteria under 42 United States Code 1437a (b) for the area in which the veteran resides; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 104-262, further requires all veterans whose income is above the VA means test threshold for Priority Group 5, but within the GMT income guidelines, to be enrolled in priority group 7; and
WHEREAS, Veterans not eligible for enrollment in priority groups 1 through 7 are enrolled in priority group 8; and
WHEREAS, On January 17, 2003, VA suspended enrollment of additional veterans in priority group 8, which resulted in a lost opportunity for VA to generate additional first party copayments; and
WHEREAS, Based on data obtained from VA, at the end of Fiscal Year 2012, VA estimated there are 6.9 million veterans ineligible to enroll in the VA health care system because of VA’s income restrictions; and
WHEREAS, VA has not conducted a feasibility or cost analysis to determine the cost or impact of reinstating enrollment of Priority Group 8g veterans; and
WHEREAS, January 2014, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) required that all Americans have medical insurance; and
WHEREAS, Unless VA reinstates enrollment of priority group 8g veterans, many priority group 8g veterans that are determined to be ineligible to enroll in VA’s patient enrollment system may be forced to purchase health insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplaces established by the ACA; and
WHEREAS, Once an ineligible veteran is forced to purchase health insurance offered through the Health Insurance Marketplaces, The American Legion is concerned that these veterans may never return to the VA health-care system; and
WHEREAS, VA would lose out on an opportunity to bring co-pay required veterans back into the VA health-care system, which would result in a loss of millions of dollars that could be used to support the delivery of health care to our Nation’s veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges
the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a feasibility study to determine the impact and cost of reinstating the enrollment of priority group 8g veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA promulgate regulations to reinstate the enrollment of priority group 8g veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to ensure VA’s appropriation is adequate to reinstate enrollment of priority group 8g veterans.

Resolution No. 3: Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability

Origin: Alaska

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has come under scrutiny by Congress, veterans service organizations, media and in the veterans community for its failures in leadership performance and accountability which has resulted in numerous quality of care issues, patient safety issues and veteran deaths; and

WHEREAS, In Pittsburgh, PA, the Veteran Integrated Service Network director received a Presidential Distinguished Rank award in the amount of $66,000 despite an outbreak of Legionella at the facility where five veterans died; and

WHEREAS, In Atlanta, GA, two VA Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) reports identified serious instances of mismanagement at the facility that led to the drug-overdose death of two patients and the suicide of another veteran related to mismanagement and lengthy waiting times for mental health care; and

WHEREAS, In Jackson, MS, Congress held a field hearing and investigation with multiple concerns regarding missed diagnoses of fatal illnesses; understaffing; overbooked patients; lack of oversight for the medical center’s nurse practitioners; lack of patient access to physicians; radiology reports being misread and unread within 30 days; improper sterilization of medical instruments; and

WHEREAS, In Fayetteville, NC, according to a VAOIG report, facility employees did not complete required suicide prevention follow-ups 90 percent of the time for patients at a high risk of suicide and the facility was noncompliant with cleanliness of patient care areas, environmental safety, dental clinic safety and training and testing procedures; and

WHEREAS, In Columbia, SC, the facility had 11 directors and acting/interim directors within a three-year period during which time, there were six deaths and a total of 20 institutional disclosures sent to veterans for the facility’s delayed in providing gastrointestinal screenings for colorectal cancer; and

WHEREAS, In Phoenix, AZ, according to news reports, the director authorized and promoted the illegal use of paper wait lists among the facility staff, which led to increased wait times for primary care and 40 deaths of veterans who died while waiting for their care; and

WHEREAS, Each of the facility directors that presided over these delays, lack of quality care and preventable veteran deaths received bonuses; and

WHEREAS, If there is a lack of performance and accountability, the employees at fault should be removed or demoted; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to enact legislation that provides the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the authority to:

Remove any individual from the Department of Veterans Affairs that the secretary determines the performance of the individual warrants such removal; or

Transfer or demote the individual to a General Schedule position without any increased monetary benefit.
Resolution No. 5: Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Process  
Origin: Alaska  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) was established in July 1933 and was given the authority to hear appeals on benefit decisions; and  
WHEREAS, Per Title 38, United States Code (USC), section 7101, members of BVA should conduct hearings and dispose of appeals properly before the Board in a timely manner; and  
WHEREAS, BVA has witnessed a drastic increase of more than 56 percent of appealed claims from April 2010 to April 2015; and  
WHEREAS, Veterans electing to appeal a decision rendered by the VA can expect to wait in excess of four years for a decision from BVA; and  
WHEREAS, VA aims to adjudicate veterans’ claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy, but did not account for appealed claims; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to address all claims, to include its growing inventory of appeals in an expeditious and accurate manner; and, be it finally  
RESOLVED, That VA create no program that diminishes a veteran’s due process rights.

Resolution No. 6: Department of Veterans Affairs Construction Programs  
Origin: Alaska  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently has major medical projects underway in Denver, CO; Orlando, FL; New Orleans, LA and further redesign projects of Las Vegas, NV which was recently completed; and  
WHEREAS, According to a Government Accountability Office Report - Cost Increases and Schedule Delays at the Four Largest Projects – “cost increases ranged from 59 percent to 144 percent representing a total cost increase of nearly $366 million per project with average schedule delays ranging from 14 to 74 months with an average delay of 35 months per VA major construction project”; and  
WHEREAS, In April 2012, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs established the Construction Review Council to serve as the single point of oversight and performance accountability for the planning, budgeting, executing and delivering of VA’s real property capital asset program; and  
WHEREAS, VA issued a new handbook for construction change order processing and increased the change order threshold cost from $100,000 to $250,000 to prevent length approval and wait times at the national level in order to speed up change orders on the local levels; and  
WHEREAS, Veterans are frustrated and concerned with VA’s construction processes and the continued delays and cost overruns and unsure whether VA’s improvements will ensure VA major construction in the future will be within schedule and budget; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation and congressional oversight to improve future Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) construction programs; and, be it finally  
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge VA to consider all available options, both within the agency and externally, to include, but not limited to the Army Corps of Engineers, to ensure major construction programs are completed on time and within budget.
Resolution No. 8: Department of Veterans Affairs Preservation of National Historic Properties

Origin: South Dakota

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The mission statement of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is to fulfill President Lincoln’s promise ‘to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan’ by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s veterans; and

WHEREAS, In furtherance of this mission, the VA stewards more than 2,000 historic buildings and landscapes in its portfolio of 5,800 structures, including some of the Nation’s most significant buildings and campuses related to the medical care and treatment of America’s veterans; and

WHEREAS, Dozens of the VA’s historic buildings and landscapes have been designated by the Department of the Interior as historically and architecturally significant through listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including five campuses and one building recognized as National Historic Landmarks, the Nation’s highest and most prestigious historic designation; and

WHEREAS, These historic buildings and landscapes have consistently provided high-quality medical care to veterans—some for more than a century; and

WHEREAS, Many of the VA’s historic medical facilities and the communities that they serve, such as Hot Springs, South Dakota, known as ‘The Veterans Town,’ provide a sense of heritage and continuity for generations of America’s veterans; and

WHEREAS, Some high-performing historic medical facilities, such as the Hot Springs VA Medical Center in South Dakota, a National Historic Landmark which received a 2013 Joint Commission Gold Seal of Approval, are currently proposed by the VA for closure; and

WHEREAS, Under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the VA is legally obligated to preserve the historic properties under its care and consider the impacts of agency programs and projects on historic properties and evaluate alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate these impacts; and

WHEREAS, According to the 2013 National Trust for Historic Preservation report, titled “Honoring Our Nation’s Veterans: Saving Their Places of Health Care and Healing,” the VA routinely neglects, or circumvents, its responsibilities pursuant to NHPA; and

WHEREAS, This lack of compliance with NHPA and other federal law places hundreds of historic buildings that provide quality medical care to veterans at risk of demolition, neglect and abandonment and removes meaningful stakeholder input, including that of veterans, from the decision-making process; and

WHEREAS, Many of the historic VA medical centers in the VA’s portfolio were authorized by Congress to honor America’s veterans with monumental buildings that incorporated design elements that were conducive to healing like ample daylight, fresh air and serene landscapes, a concept promoted in current health-care facility planning; and

WHEREAS, Historic hospital buildings have been rehabilitated and used for high-quality, modern medical care, often at a fraction of the cost for new construction; and

WHEREAS, America’s veterans would benefit from the VA committing to improved stewardship of the historic properties within its portfolio, thereby providing continued access to medical center campuses conducive to healing and 21st century medical care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to comply with all laws that pertain to the National Historic Preservation Act; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to use Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act to provide
additional leasing opportunities for the continued use of the VA’s historic medical facilities for veteran’s care; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to establish a new construction funding account within the VA that is dedicated to the maintenance of VA’s historic medical facilities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to enact legislation that would require the VA to establish an office within the department that would be responsible for the oversight and improvements of all VA’s historic medical facilities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to include in such legislation annual reporting requirements that would require the VA to report how the federal agency is meeting the requirements of National Historic Preservation Act, any action VA is taking to bring the department into compliance and the amount of funding VA has allocated toward each VA’s historic medical facility.

Resolution No. 9: Black Hills National Cemetery Expansion
Origin: South Dakota
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Black Hills National Cemetery, located two miles east of Sturgis, South Dakota, is one of our nation’s most sacred shrines representing an embodiment of the sacrifices that were made to uphold our country’s ideals and freedoms; and

WHEREAS, More than 26,000 veterans and their dependents are buried there on just over 101 acres of land that was opened in 1948 and is currently expected to last through 2032; and

WHEREAS, The Black Hills National Cemetery is one of 134 National Cemeteries nationwide and like some other National Cemeteries, available land and space for future expansion is a concern; and

WHEREAS, The first contact between the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) concerning the transfer of 191 acres of land adjoining the Black Hills National Cemetery on the north side was made in 1998; and

WHEREAS, Under Statute 40 U.S.C. 472, the Bureau of Land Management has withdrawn said acres for the purpose of transferal to the National Cemetery Administration; and

WHEREAS, After nearly 18 years, the land deal between BLM and NCA is no closer to completion than the day it started; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Cemetery Administration, and the U.S. Congress to work together to finalize the transfer of the BLM land to the Black Hills National Cemetery which will ensure ample land and space for future expansion.

Resolution No. 10: Oppose Closure of the VA Black Hills Health Care System’s Hot Springs Campus
Origin: South Dakota
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The men and women of our armed services have been at war for over a decade carrying out our nation’s War on Terror; and

WHEREAS, Our nation’s veterans have earned and deserve the highest level of care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, Veteran services have been offered by various agencies in Hot Springs, South Dakota for more than 100 years and has always provided exemplary quality of care for our nation’s veterans; and
WHEREAS, The community of Hot Springs, South Dakota continues to provide a positive environment conducive to healing our nation’s veterans who use the facility; and
WHEREAS, The community of Hot Springs and the VA Medical Center in Hot Springs, South Dakota is uniquely qualified to address the needs of our newest veterans; and
WHEREAS, Like those veterans who have come before, many of our newest veterans have special needs related to post traumatic stress, suicide prevention, substance abuse treatment and homelessness prevention; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion reaffirms its support for keeping the Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center and residential rehabilitation services in Hot Springs, South Dakota; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That, as a minimum, the VA create a Center of Excellence for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and homelessness prevention at the VA campus in Hot Springs, South Dakota.

Resolution No. 11: Medical Marijuana Research
Origin: Louisiana
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, Over the past several years, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) have been thrust into the forefront of the consciousness of the medical community and the general public in large part due to recent combat operations and subsequent recognition of these potentially ‘silent injuries’; and
WHEREAS, Our foundation of knowledge guiding current diagnostics and interventions of PTSD and TBI has gained through decades of study in the academic medical world; and
WHEREAS, PTSD and TBI produce a complex constellation of medical consequences including physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive deficits; and
WHEREAS, The impact is heterogeneous given the varied types of injury (closed, penetrating, blast), severity, comorbid conditions, and premorbid characteristics; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) (May 2007), by consensus, have defined traumatic brain injury as any traumatically induced structural injury and/or physiological disruption of brain function as a result of an external force that is indicted by new onset or worsening of at least one of the following clinical signs, immediately following the event:
1. Any period of loss of or a decreased level of consciousness;
2. Any loss of memory for events immediately before or after the injury;
3. Any alteration in mental state at the time of the injury (e.g., confusion, disorientation, slowed thinking);
4. Neurological deficits (e.g., weakness, balance disturbance, praxis, paresis/plegia, change in vision, other sensory alterations, aphasia) that may or may not be transient;
5. Intracranial lesions; and
WHEREAS, TBI is a leading cause of death and disability in the United States where one and a half million Americans incur a traumatic brain injury each year (CDC, 2007); and
WHEREAS, These figures likely underestimate the true incidence of military injuries and those with mild injuries may not seek health care; and
WHEREAS, Direct costs for hospital care, extended care, and other medical care and services, coupled with indirect costs such as lost productivity were estimated at $60 billion annually in 2000 (CDC 2007; Finkelstein et al., 2006); and
WHEREAS, These figures do not include the physical, emotional, and social costs to the injured persons and their family from TBI-related disability; and
WHEREAS, For fiscal year 2009, there were 1,313 veterans who received VA inpatient hospital care for TBI; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veteran Affairs defines PTSD as a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape; and

WHEREAS, From April 2007 through fiscal year 2009, thousands of veterans were identified as possibly having PTSD or a TBI through outpatient screening of individuals presenting to the VA for health care following deployment in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom; and

WHEREAS, About 20 years ago, scientists discovered a system in the brain called the endocannabinoid system that responds to 60 chemicals in marijuana, also known as cannabis; and

WHEREAS, This system plays a role in many of the body’s functions, such as in the heart, along with the digestive, endocrine, immune, nervous, and reproductive systems; and

WHEREAS, This discovery sparked interest in finding specific chemicals made from marijuana that could be targeted for specific conditions; and

WHEREAS, Marijuana is classified as schedule I drugs and drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, methadone, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), meperidine (Demerol), oxycodone (OxyContin), fentanyl, Dexedrine, Adderall, and Ritalin are classified as schedule II drugs; and

WHEREAS, In April 2016, the Drug Enforcement Agency gave its approval to a study on the effect of medical marijuana on post-traumatic stress disorder, the first randomized, controlled research in the U.S. for PTSD that will use the actual plant instead of oils or synthesized cannabis; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Drug Enforcement Agency to license privately-funded medical marijuana production operations in the United States to enable safe and efficient cannabis drug development research; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to amend legislation to remove Marijuana from schedule I and reclassify it in a category that, at a minimum, will recognize cannabis as a drug with potential medical value.

Resolution No. 12: Project Shipboard Hazard and Defense
Origin: Montana
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Project SHAD, an acronym for Shipboard Hazard and Defense, was part of a larger effort called Project 112, was allegedly conducted during 1962 and 1973; and

WHEREAS, The project started under President John F. Kennedy's administration, and was authorized by his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, as part of a total review of the U.S. military; and

WHEREAS, The exact number of participants is unknown but it is estimated that more than 6,000 military personnel, mostly Navy and Marine Corps personnel, participated in a series of tests of U.S. warship vulnerability to biological and chemical warfare agents without their knowledge; and

WHEREAS, In September 2002, the Institute of Medicine agreed to undertake a scientific study, funded by the VA, of potential long-term health effects of participation in Project SHAD; and

WHEREAS, Participants also reported statistically significantly worse health than controls; and
WHEREAS, Comparing all Project SHAD participants versus all controls, heart disease deaths showed a statistically significant increase; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs manual states “Veterans Affairs Disability compensation is a monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. These disabilities are considered to be service connected”; and

WHEREAS, Participants in project SHAD have been diagnosed and treated by the department of Veterans Affairs without any monetary compensation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Department of Veterans Affairs accept the illnesses caused by involvement in Project Shipboard Hazard and Defense (SHAD) be classified as service connected and provide just compensation to those veterans for their disabilities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion national organization, on behalf of military personnel involved in any way with Project SHAD, demand the Department of Veterans Affairs accept the fact that these members of the armed forces were unwittingly exposed to life threatening chemical and/or biological agents while in active military service and are suffering or have suffered now and prior to their death from exposure to these agents, be listed as presumptive causes of their illnesses or death.

Resolution No. 13: Fiduciary Responsibility
Origin: Montana
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Fiduciary Program was established to protect veterans and other beneficiaries who are unable to manage their financial affairs due to injury, disease, and age; and

WHEREAS, VA only determines an individual to be unable to manage their financial affairs after receipt of medical documentation or if a court of competent jurisdiction has already made the determination; and

WHEREAS, An Office of Inspector General (OIG) Audit of the Fiduciary Program’s Effectiveness in Addressing Potential Misuse of Beneficiary Funds in 2010 identified the Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) failure to examine financial reports, as well as failure to timely respond to misuse allegations in 96 percent of the cases reviewed; and

WHEREAS, In fiscal year 2013, fiduciary personnel conducted 325 misuse investigations resulting in 118 fiduciaries being removed for misusing benefits; and

WHEREAS, An OIG Audit of Fiduciary Program’s Management of Field Examinations in 2015 found that VBA staff did not meet timeliness standards for about 45,500 (42 percent) of approximately 109,000 pending and completed field examinations during calendar year 2013; and

WHEREAS, The VA OIG estimated that these untimely field examinations placed about $360.7 million in benefit payments and about $487.6 million in estate values at increased risk; and

WHEREAS, VA’s current Fiduciary Program has been inadequate in its protection of benefits provided to veterans and other beneficiaries; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide oversight over their fiduciary program and that it protects veterans and their beneficiaries who are unable to manage their financial affairs.
WHEREAS, Agent Orange was the most common herbicide used in Southeast Asia by the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War from 1962-1971; and
WHEREAS, Agent Orange was contaminated by the carcinogen dioxin (2, 3, 7, 8-tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin (TCDD)); and
WHEREAS, Over two (2) million veterans served in Vietnam during the Vietnam War and are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange; and
WHEREAS, Scientific evidence has linked human exposure to dioxin and certain diseases; and
WHEREAS, A significant number of Vietnam veterans have developed various cancers, neurological disorders, liver dysfunction and other severe diseases; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion supported Public Law 96-151 (1979), which mandates that the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) conduct a major epidemiological study of Vietnam veterans who were exposed to dioxin, unless it is determined to be unfeasible; and
WHEREAS, VA was congressionally mandated by Public Law 102-4 (1991) to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to review existing peer-reviewed research on herbicides, to include their components, exposure and medical evidence on related health effects; and
WHEREAS, A committee convened by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies to study the health effects of herbicide exposure had little information about the exposures the Vietnam veterans encountered and recommended in its 1994 biennial report that VA, upon discovering the feasibility of a valid exposure reconstruction model, facilitate epidemiological studies; and
WHEREAS, The Secretary of VA, in response to the recommendation, requested that IOM convene a separate committee to oversee development and evaluation of herbicide exposure models for use in studies of Vietnam veterans; and
WHEREAS, The IOM committee determined, in 2003, that a model created by researchers from Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health demonstrated the feasibility of a valid exposure-reconstruction model of Vietnam veterans’ herbicide exposure and recommended that VA and other governmental agencies promote more epidemiological studies of veterans by non-governmental groups and independent researchers; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs has still not funded the major epidemiology study mandated by public law; and
WHEREAS, In view of the current absence of alternative judicial recourse to remedy the injustice perpetuated on so many disabled Vietnam veterans, their families and survivors, The American Legion will continue to monitor other pending dioxin-related suits; and
WHEREAS, Information has been released by the Department of the Defense on numerous locations other than Vietnam where the herbicide was tested, sprayed, and stored, including: testing at Fort Drum, New York, in 1959; spraying in the Panama Canal Zone in the 1960s and 1970s and in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in 1968-69; and the storage of unused herbicide on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific from 1972-78; and
WHEREAS, VA has recently identified more units that were exposed to herbicide at the Korean DMZ; and
WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code, section 1116 and title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, section 3.309, set forth certain presumptions that apply to claims for service connection based on herbicide exposure by veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the period January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; and
WHEREAS, Veterans who served in other locations during these periods who may have been exposed to the herbicide and who may have developed one of the recognized Agent Orange-related diseases, set forth in title 38, United States Code, section 1116 and title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, section 3.309, are not entitled to presumptive service connection for their disability, rather they must meet the more stringent requirements for direct service connection; and

WHEREAS, This inequity was not contemplated at the time of the enactment of Public Law 102-4, the Agent Orange Act of 1991, as amended, due to limited available information on the full extent of the United States’ Agent Orange testing, spraying, and storage activities; and

WHEREAS, Under title 38, United States Code, Chapter 18, benefits are payable to children of veterans that served in the Republic of Vietnam during the period January 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975, and who suffer from the birth defect spina bifida; and

WHEREAS, Recent legislation has extended the spina bifida benefits to include the children of veterans who served in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone during the period of September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971, and determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to have been exposed to herbicides during such service; and

WHEREAS, The children of veterans who served in locations other than Vietnam and Korea who were possibly exposed to Agent Orange would be denied entitlement to compensation for spina bifida under the current statute and regulations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion continue to urge the completion of the scientific study mandated by Public Law 96-151; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion vigorously support the liberalization of the rules relating to the evaluation of studies involving exposure to dioxin and the adjudication of claims based on Agent Orange exposure; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continue to closely monitor the development of all ongoing research on the long-term effects of Agent Orange exposure and point out to the proper officials any perceived deficiencies or discrepancies in these projects; and to ensure that government committees charged with review of such research are composed of impartial members of the medical and scientific community; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That veterans reporting to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care facilities claiming exposure to Agent Orange be provided examinations and treatment which are thorough and appropriate, and that VA physicians demonstrate compassion in responding to the medical needs of these veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, section 1116, to provide entitlement to these presumptions for those veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange while serving in areas other than the Republic of Vietnam where Agent Orange was tested, sprayed, or stored; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, Chapter 18, to provide entitlement to spina bifida benefits for the child or children of any veteran who was exposed to Agent Orange as the result of service in the Republic of Vietnam or in other locations where Agent Orange was tested, sprayed, or stored.
Resolution No. 36: Copayment and Enrollment Fees for Priority Groups 7 & 8
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Since the enactment of Public Law (PL) 104-262, that authorized eligibility reform and open enrollment process, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), has experienced a dramatic growth from 2.5 million veterans to over 7 million veterans enrolled in VA health care; and

WHEREAS, Fiscal Year 2002 saw the astronomical growth of Priority Group 7 veterans seeking health care at their local VA medical facility and the creation of a new Priority Group 8; and

WHEREAS, VA, upon creating the new Priority Group 8, placed an immediate suspension on all new Priority Group 8 enrollments; and

WHEREAS, VHA is authorized to bill, collect, and retain copayments and the third party insurance payment of Priority Groups 7 and 8 veterans; and

WHEREAS, During the past several years, VA has proposed to increase the outpatient co-payment from $15 to $20 and the prescription copayment from $8 to $15 per 30 day supply, as well as, levy a $250 enrollment fee on Priority Groups 7 and 8 veterans; and

WHEREAS, In 2006, VA proposed to eliminate the copayment offset (reduction in payment) to Priority Groups 7 and 8 veterans who have third party insurance; and

WHEREAS, The copayment increases and enrollment fees could suppress the demand for VA services at the expense of Priority Groups 7 and 8 veterans who may not be able to afford the copayment increases and out-of-pocket enrollment fee; and

WHEREAS, VA believes these initiatives will ultimately drive 1.2 million veterans away from the VA health care system; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion adamantly oppose any effort to increase copayments or impose an enrollment fee for Priority Groups 7 and 8 veterans to receive Department of Veterans Affairs health care.

Resolution No. 37: Improvements to Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Programs
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Women veterans are the fastest growing demographic serving in the military and enrolling in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for their health-care treatment; and

WHEREAS, According to VA statistics, the total veteran population in the United States, as of September 30, 2012, was approximately 22.3 million, of which women veterans numbered 2,248,579; and

WHEREAS, Women veterans continue to face many barriers and challenges with enrolling for and receiving VA care due to a number of reasons such as: not identifying as a veteran; not being recognized as a veteran by VA employees and staff; lack of awareness and understanding of their VA health-care benefits; and the stigma and perceptions that VA is still an “all-male” health-care system; and

WHEREAS, According to VA, women veterans are 30 percent less likely to enroll for health care than their male counterparts, which is as a result of many factors that include, but are not limited to, lack of awareness of benefits and fragmentation of care from limited access to gender specific care (OB/GYN, Mammography); and

WHEREAS, According to VA estimates, 27 percent of female Vietnam veterans report that they have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and 20 percent of female veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with PTSD; and
WHEREAS, The majority of VA facilities do not offer inpatient/residential mental health programs for women veterans, and as a result, based on findings from the System Worth Saving Task Force, one veteran had to travel from Colorado to the Coatesville, PA VA Medical Center in order to receive inpatient treatment for Military Sexual Trauma and PTSD; and

WHEREAS, Research on women veterans long-term care, health and reproductive issues is needed, especially in developing mental health treatments for women veterans in their child-bearing ages; and

WHEREAS, On October 3, 2011, VA launched congressional child care pilot programs for veterans at the Buffalo VA Medical Center, Northport, NY and the Tacoma, WA VA Medical Center; and

WHEREAS, On October 3, 2013, the legislative authority for these child care programs expired and VA no longer has congressional authority to provide these crucial and vital child care services, which many veterans have come to rely on when seen by their VA health care provider for their scheduled appointment; and

WHEREAS, Without the support of VA’s child care program, veterans may no longer be able to attend their scheduled appointments, which will result in a significant increase in VA’s no show rate or veterans not receiving care in VA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, that The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to work with the Department of Labor and Department of Defense to develop a customized women veterans health-care track for the Transition Goals, Plans and Success program, facilitated by women clinicians; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge VA to establish an acceptable benchmark for communication of mammogram results to women veterans that is better than industry standards, which currently is 30 days for normal results and 3 to 5 days for abnormal results; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge VA to evaluate the access and demand for mental health residential services for women veterans at each of the 152 VA Medical Centers and require each of the 21 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to have a minimum of one (1) Inpatient/Residential Mental Health Program site per VISN; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That VA conduct studies on the long-term health effects for women in the military and differences in treatment for mental health conditions, especially for women in their child-bearing age; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to pass legislation extending the VA child care program for veterans, which expired on October 3, 2013.

Resolution No. 38: Exempt VA Benefits and Services from Pay-Go Provision
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Budget Enforcement Act (BEA) significantly amended the laws pertaining to the budget process by constraining direct spending through a Pay-As-You-Go (PAY-GO) requirement for all legislation affecting the direct spending of all federal agencies and departments; and

WHEREAS, Under this statute, as an example, if Congress wishes to establish a new entitlement or expand an existing program for veterans, it must find the money to fund such change within existing budget limits; and

WHEREAS, Wartime disabled veterans have earned the benefits and services they, their dependents and survivors receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as a result of the injuries sustained during their period of wartime service; and
WHEREAS, The benefits and services received by wartime-disabled veterans as a result of their service-connected disabilities are an extension of the cost of war; and
WHEREAS, This country has a moral obligation to continue to care for these citizen-soldiers who have risen in defense and support of the ideals of this great nation and who have returned to civilian life with service-connected disabilities; and
WHEREAS, Since BEA PAY-GO requires Congress to fund new benefits or services within existing spending limits this, in effect, requires one group of disabled veterans to give up benefits or services, so that another group of wartime disabled veterans can receive benefits or services to which they are entitled; and
WHEREAS, The budget implications of PAY-GO are often a deterrent to favorable congressional action on major changes in veterans legislation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to exempt the Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services provided to service-connected disabled veterans, their dependents and survivors from the Pay-As-You-Go (PAY-GO) provision of the Budget Enforcement Act.

Resolution No. 39: Research to Develop a Blood Test to Detect Colorectal Cancer
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Colorectal Cancer (CRC) is the third most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States; and
WHEREAS, In the 2013 VA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report “Gastroenterology (GI) Consult Delays at the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center, Columbia, SC,” the OIG cited the Centers for Disease Control that more than 22 million Americans remain unscreened for CRC; and
WHEREAS, Failure to recognize the critical nursing staffing shortages resulted in a GI consult backlog of 3,800 gastroenterology consults, 700 of them critical; and
WHEREAS, During the review “look-back” period, 280 patients were diagnosed with GI malignancies, 52 of which had been associated with a delay in diagnosis and treatment; and
WHEREAS, In accordance with the Veterans Health Administration Directive 2007-004 titled, “Colorectal Cancer Screening,” it is VA’s policy that eligible veterans at average or high risk for CRC must be offered CRC screening; and
WHEREAS, To detect CRC, there are four tests commonly used:
1. Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)—This test checks for hidden blood in fecal material (stool);
2. Sigmoidoscopy—This test examines the rectum and lower colon using a lighted instrument called a sigmoidoscope;
3. Colonoscopy—This test examines the rectum and entire colon are examined using a lighted instrument called a colonoscope,
4. Double contrast barium enema (DCBE)—With this test a series of x-rays of the entire colon and rectum are taken after the patient is given an enema with a barium solution and air is introduced into the colon; and
WHEREAS, Delays in detecting CRC due to backlogs, and scheduling can result in patients deaths as in the case where six deaths were linked to delayed screenings for colorectal cancer at a South Carolina VA Medical Center; and
WHEREAS, On May 28, 2013, in House Report 113-90 titled, “Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bills,” the Committee on Appropriations encouraged the VA to support additional research and
development in the field, including investigation of a less costly blood test for colorectal cancer; and

WHEREAS, In a May 2012 VA Research Currents publication it included a quote stating, "A simple blood test would be the ideal approach to colorectal cancer"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to increase the budget for The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) research and clinical trials to develop a blood test for colorectal cancer; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA accelerate the research and development of a screening blood test for detecting colon cancer to ensure that veterans at risk for colon cancer are properly screened and evaluated to prevent further harm or death.

Resolution No. 40: Exempt Certain Income from VA Pension Rate Determination
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (Consolidated with Resolution No. 261 (IL))

WHEREAS, Veterans and surviving spouses in receipt of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pension benefits under Public Law (PL) 95-588 must report all income received from outside sources, since this directly affects the amount of VA pension to which they are entitled; and

WHEREAS, Countable income received by the veteran from most sources would include earnings, disability and retirement payments, interest and dividends, and net income from farming or business; and

WHEREAS, Any reimbursement that would compensate a veteran for expenses due to an accident, theft or loss would also be considered countable income; and

WHEREAS, At many polling places, there is a shortage of needed supervisory personnel and serving as an election judge helps ensure a fair and impartial election process; and

WHEREAS, The amount of financial remuneration received from these types of civic activities is relatively small, but it can result in the reduction in monthly benefits, dollar for dollar, or the complete loss of entitlement to pension; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend paragraph (5), section 1503(a), and title 38, United States Code, to exempt the reimbursement of expenses related to accidents, theft loss or casualty loss from being included in the determination of countable income with respect to pensions for veterans and surviving spouses and children of veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to exempt income received from jury duty and income from service as an election judge in determining the VA pension rate under Public Law (P.L.) 95-588.

Resolution No. 41: State Veterans Home Funding for Construction Grants
Origin: Michigan
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Federal funding for construction grants to State Veterans Homes has been static at $85 million for the past three (3) fiscal years (FY 2011 to 2014); and

WHEREAS, In FY 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget proposed a decrease to this funding amount by $5 million; and

WHEREAS, The President’s budget request for 2014 included $85 million for State Veterans Homes construction grants; and
WHEREAS, The National Association of State Veterans Homes expects to see an increase in the number of State Home construction projects submitted in the coming years as more states are once again able to provide matching funds for projects that were previously withdrawn or deferred due to the recessions; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs has added a new type of Community Living Center (CLC) which is referred to as the small house concept in which the house is a home for 10 to 12 residents; and

WHEREAS, The home concept is based on the “small house” model, which is more intimate, less institutional, and contains fewer residents to accomplish the goal of a home setting; and

WHEREAS, The CLC neighborhood consists of not more than twelve (12) homes and a community center; and

WHEREAS, This new home concept is leading to higher construction costs for new State Veterans Home projects and renovations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide funding to the Departments of Veterans Affairs for State Veteran Homes construction grants at a minimum of $125 million annually, and that these costs permit sufficient funding to mitigate life-safety issues in State Veterans Homes, as well as the design and construction of new types of Community Living Center “small house” models.

Resolution No. 42: Oppose any Reductions to the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Budget Due to Sequestration

Origin: Kentucky
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The failure of the bipartisan Congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, or "super committee" in 2011 resulted in automatic spending cuts, known as "sequestration", which took effect in 2012; and

WHEREAS, In an April 23, 2012 letter to the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget made it clear that "all programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including Veterans' Medical Care, are exempt from 'sequestration' under provisions of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985"; and

WHEREAS, According to the Congressional Research Service Report on "Budget 'Sequestration' and Selected Program Exemptions and Special Rules," "the Budget Control Act (BCA) requires that $109 billion in spending – divided equally between defense and nondefense must be reduced in FY 2014 (and each subsequent fiscal year through FY 2021) – with lowering the discretionary spending limits by about $91 billion and sequestering $18 billion in nonexempt mandatory spending"; and

WHEREAS, The lowering of discretionary spending limits or sequestration will have a detrimental impact on VA's budget and ability to properly care for and treat our nation's veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion oppose any effort through the administration, members of Congress or Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proposal, policy or law to reduce VA's budget due to sequestration; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to enact legislation to provide a permanent exemption for VA's Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administrations' mandatory and discretionary programs.
Resolution No. 43: Department of Veterans Affairs Child Care Program

Origin: Kentucky

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) mission is to provide for those who have borne the battle; and

WHEREAS, The veteran should not be penalized in receiving access to health care because they have children; and

WHEREAS, In 2010, the VA was granted authority under the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, Public Law 111-163, Section 205, to carry out a two-year pilot program to assess the provision of care for the children of qualified veterans; and

WHEREAS, The program was officially launched in October 2011 at three VA Medical Centers in Buffalo and Northport New York and American Lake (Tacoma), Washington; and

WHEREAS, Upon completion of the pilot program a report will be submitted to Congress on the finding, recommendations, and conclusions for the continuation of the program; and

WHEREAS, The VA would need Congress to provide an extension of authority in order to continue providing child care services beyond the two-year pilot; and

WHEREAS, A memorandum VAOPGCADV 7-2009, from the VA Office of The General Counsel provided a legal opinion on the authority to provide child care for Veterans Health Administration (VHA) patients, which addressed the legal barriers that prevent VA from providing child care for VHA patients when the patients have appointments at a VHA facility; and

WHEREAS, The VA is not authorized to operate child care facilities for VHA patients; and

WHEREAS, VA may provide child care services in VHA facilities only if Congress expressly granted that authority to VA and/or if child care is “included by necessary implication” in the authority granted VA; and

WHEREAS, Currently, no statue authorizes VHA or VA in general to provide child care at VHA facilities; and

WHEREAS, Congress has authorized VA to operate child care centers to benefit VA employees and Federal government employees such as The Department of Defense stated; and

WHEREAS, Under 38 U.S.C. 1701 (6) the words “medical services” include inter alia, examination, treatment, rehabilitative services, and other services such as surgical, dental, optometric, and preventive health services; and

WHEREAS, Hospital care is defined as medical services rendered in the course of the hospitalization of any veteran; and

WHEREAS, Hospital care also includes other supplies or services as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines to be reasonable and necessary; and

WHEREAS, Under 1701 (6) (F) medical services are directly related to the medical care of the veteran such as wheelchairs and clothing to accommodate prostheses; and

WHEREAS, The memorandum concluded that it would be unreasonable to conclude that child care may constitute a service that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs could make available; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to pass legislation to provide child care services to veterans with children in order for the veteran to receive access to the quality care that they have earned.
Resolution No. 44: Department of Veterans Affairs Rural Health Care Program

Origin: Kentucky

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, One out of every three veterans treated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) lives in rural communities; and

WHEREAS, Rural veterans have been underserved due to a lack of access to health care, which can be attributed to greater travel barriers and a lack of public transportation; and

WHEREAS, Although VA has established access standards, the standards and definition of rural and highly rural veterans do not take into account the distance and driving time it takes for veterans to be provided with VA care; and

WHEREAS, Rural Health Consultants (RHCs) are located and fall under the Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), which leads to additional collateral duties, inconsistent with the schedules, ultimately distracting RHCs from needed outreach to facilities within their VISN; and

WHEREAS, The Rural Health Resource Center is advisory in nature and primarily conducts research without providing direct resources to rural veterans or outreach; and

WHEREAS, VA Medical Centers in rural areas have concerns in recruiting and retaining qualified medical and clinical providers, in many cases rural areas do not have attractive resources for medical providers; and

WHEREAS, While the development of Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) have increased access to health care for veterans in rural areas, communication between the CBOCs and medical centers has decreased, creating communication and managerial difficulties; and

WHEREAS, Telehealth services have more than doubled in the last four years, creating more access to health care for rural veterans, however, space and bandwidth limit the level of service and number of veterans the VA can serve; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop its own definition of rural and highly rural veterans, and not based on the Census Bureau’s, but on access and driving times; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Office of Rural Health (ORH) to centralize and consolidate the Rural Health Consultants (RHC) under the ORH; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge ORH to ensure Rural Health Resource Centers provide service to rural veterans from surveys, national hotline and connecting veterans living in rural communities with providers; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to develop a recruitment and retention strategy to incentivize medical providers to practice in rural communities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to ensure each Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) has adequate staff and direct communication between the CBOC’s and medical center’s RHC; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the ORH to search for opportunities to expand telehealth services by collaborating with local offices in rural areas that can share space.
Resolution No. 51: WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Entitlements  
Origin: Colorado  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, The American Legion strongly supports the extension of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health benefits to include all U.S. veterans; and  
WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), Chapter 17, Sect. 1710 (a) (2) (e) requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish needed hospital care and medical services without regards to the other VA eligibility requirements to veterans of the Mexican border period or of WWI; and  
WHEREAS, Only a small number of WWI veterans and none from the Mexican border period are alive today; and  
WHEREAS, The veterans of WWII have served our country honorably both in the war and as exemplary citizens of our great nation and are reaching an age when such medical services are needed similar to those granted WWI and Mexican border period veterans in the aforementioned law; and  
WHEREAS, The current medical services provided to the WWII veterans by VA is based on a category and/or an income means test and proves difficult for these aging veterans to complete as well as being cumbersome for VA to apply and thus prevents some WWII veterans from accessing those services; and  
WHEREAS, The funds the VA spends to apply this bureaucratic means test procedure could be better spent providing direct care to these WWII veterans; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support amending Title 38, U.S.C. Chapter 17, to grant World War II veterans the same Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital and medical entitlements as granted to World War I and Spanish American War veterans to honor their service and ensure the VA continues the same standards of care.

Resolution No. 52: Department of Veterans Affairs Means Test  
Origin: Colorado  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, Public Law 107-135, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001, directed VA to implement a Geographic Means Test (GMT); and  
WHEREAS, VA uses the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s “low-income” geographic-based income limits as the thresholds for VA’s GMT; and  
WHEREAS, Congress established Priority Groups within the VA to prioritize access to VA health care; and  
WHEREAS, The Secretary of the VA authorized suspension of new enrollment of Priority Group 8 veterans in January 2003; and  
WHEREAS, Using the adjusted gross income may reclassify them as a Priority Group 7, thus allowing enrollment into VA; and  
WHEREAS, Using the adjusted gross income may reclassify Priority Group 7 veterans as Priority Group 5 veterans; and  
WHEREAS, The eligibility requirement for enrollment in Priority Group 5 or 7 for veterans to receive health care services provided by VHA is based on income; and  
WHEREAS, The income for the Means Test is based on gross income, not adjusted gross income; and  
WHEREAS, All other Federal agencies have eligibility on adjusted gross income; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to change Department of Veterans Affairs Means Test policy to
allow adjusted gross income to be used for the eligibility criteria in Priority Groups 5, 7, and 8.

Resolution No. 53: Veterans Discounts on Federally Funded Public Transportation
Origin: Colorado
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Currently, transit systems that are recipients of the Urbanized Area Formula Grants are required to provide discounted rates to senior citizens and disabled persons; and

WHEREAS, In accordance with Section 101 of Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), the term "veteran" means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released there from under conditions other than dishonorable; and

WHEREAS, Title 49, Urbanized Formula Grants, requires the development of transportation policies and programs that contribute to providing fast, safe, efficient, and convenient transportation at the lowest cost consistent with those and other national objectives, including the efficient use and conservation of the resources of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Section 5307(d)(1)(D) currently states that elderly and handicapped individuals, or an individual presenting a Medicare card issued to that individual under title II or XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq., 1395 et seq.), will be charged during non-peak hours for transportation using or involving a facility or equipment of a project financed under this section not more than 50 percent of the peak hour fare; and

WHEREAS, There is a wide disparity of travel discounts available to veteran riders of public transportation, and offering a uniform discount policy will encourage more veterans to use public transportation; and

WHEREAS, By virtue of their service and sacrifices for this nation, veterans should be offered the same discounts offered to other recognized groups; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to amend the Urbanized Area Formula Grants in Section 5307(d)(1)(D) of title 49, United States Code (U.S.C.) to include the term veteran as defined by section 101 of title 38 U.S.C., which would allow veterans to be charged the same rate for non-peak hour transportation using or involving a facility or equipment of a project financed under this section that is not more than 50 percent of the peak hour fare.

Resolution No. 54: Designate Waldenstrom’s Macroglobulinemia as a Presumptive Condition for Veterans Who Served in Combat Theaters
Origin: Colorado
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia is a rare form of Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma; and

WHEREAS, Waldenstrom's Syndrome is among the diseases listed as a presumptive disease related to Agent Orange Exposure; and

WHEREAS, Two (2) National Institute of Health (NIH) Studies that analyzed large numbers of VA Records that showed a very high correlation of Waldenstrom's Syndrome to military service, including those not having exposure to a herbicide used during the Vietnam Era; and

WHEREAS, There is proof that herbicides were used to clear vegetation other than Vietnam, DMZ in Korea and Thailand, before, during and subsequent to the Vietnam Era; and
WHEREAS, Two large samples done by the NIH Epidemiological Studies VA Patients had an unexpectedly high incidence of Waldenstrom's exists in Veterans with Service Periods before, during and after the Vietnam Era; and

WHEREAS, Lou Gehrig's disease is a presumptive disease which has a 2-fold increase of veteran's with the disease over the general population; and

WHEREAS, Studies show the same type of ratio for veterans with Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia exists; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support enactment into law, legislation adding Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia to the list of presumptive diseases for all veterans who served in combat theaters.

Resolution No. 55: Radiation Exposure
Origin: Colorado
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DoD) had a contingent of Air Force personnel stationed at Woomera Air Force Station in South Australia; and

WHEREAS, This station was in close vicinity to nuclear weapons posted by the United Kingdom/Australia Governments, in the 1950s and 1960s; and

WHEREAS, This area in Australia is not listed on the DoD places where possible radiation exposure may exist; and

WHEREAS, An increasing number of veterans stationed at Woomera Air Force Station are contracting diseases associated with radiation exposure; and

WHEREAS, These honorably discharged veterans are being denied service connection for any disease associated with radiation exposure and medical treatment at the Veterans Administration; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourage the Congress of the United States enact legislation to add, Maralinga, South Australia and Woomera Air Force Station to the list of areas where nuclear testing was done; and, be it finally,

RESOLVED, That the Congress of the United States allow veterans stationed at Woomera Air Force Station to receive service connection and medical treatment for all diseases associated with their exposure.

Resolution No. 57: Prevent Exploitation of Veterans and Family Members Applying for Benefits, to Include Aid and Attendance
Origin: Utah
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Veterans and widows of veterans qualify for Aid and Attendance and pension benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, There are groups or individuals that charge veterans and their families to file for these benefits as much as $2,000 dollars and as a result have turned claims assistance into a profit center; and

WHEREAS, This practice allows the exploitation of our senior veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, Veterans service organizations, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, State Veterans Offices and County Veterans Service Officers all provide claims assistance without charge; and

WHEREAS, It is critical that our veterans and their families be protected from those seeking to profit from claims assistance in this area; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion goes
on record urging the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Congress to tighten current laws that prohibit the practice of charging veterans or their families for claims assistance; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the national organization support all efforts by Congress to “criminalize” the practice of charging veterans for claims assistance and creating a for-profit business based on these practices.

Resolution No. 59: Stopping Non-Attorney Representatives from Charging Fees to Provide Appellate Services to Veterans

Origin: Utah
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Veterans Choice of Representation and Benefits Enhancement Act of 2006 allowed veterans to choose licensed Attorneys and other accredited individuals to charge a fee for benefits appeals after an initial decision by the respective regional offices; and

WHEREAS, This process inadvertently has created a “cottage industry” for non-attorney representatives in some instances to collect tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for said representation; and

WHEREAS, Attorneys invest a great amount of time and resources obtaining and maintaining their licensure; and

WHEREAS, Said attorneys are overseen by licensing and disciplinary bodies that may scrutinize acts and omissions in their practice; and

WHEREAS, Non-attorney representatives have no such oversight and as such, are many times charging far above and beyond the amount for their respective time and efforts of licensed attorneys; and

WHEREAS, Many of the veterans choosing these representatives are unaware of the training, education, and ethical practices of said representatives; and

WHEREAS, Many are additionally unaware that service officers for veterans service organizations and employees of state, county and municipal governments provide said representation for no cost, and are additionally subject to oversight by the organization and/or their employers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion, as the largest veterans organization urge Congress to enact legislation to halt the ability of non-attorney representatives to charge fees to provide appellate service to veterans.

Resolution No. 62: Veterans Transportation System and Benefits Travel

Origin: Nevada
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

(Consolidated with Resolution No. 84 (DE))

WHEREAS, In the Fall of 2010, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) implemented the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) in order to improve access to VHA health care services; and

WHEREAS, The VTS program provided mobility managers, transportation coordinators, and vehicles to be driven by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff and volunteers; and

WHEREAS, On May 7, 2012, the Office of General Counsel released opinion, VAOPGCADV 5-2012, which found that the VA only has the authority to use volunteer drivers to provide veterans transportation to and from VA health care facilities, not paid employees; and

WHEREAS, Some facilities solely rely on the VTS system, because they do not have volunteer drivers; and
WHEREAS, The vans utilized by the VA must be parked on federal government property; and

WHEREAS, Some drivers in rural locations may drive up to two hours one way to pick up a van, which will total eight hours of driving in one day after conducting one trip; and

WHEREAS, If a Memorandum of Understanding was created for local facilities such as post offices, the trip times could be reduced by up to half; and

WHEREAS, The guidelines set forth by the physical examinations make it hard to recruit and retain volunteer drivers, which can create an inconsistent delivery system; and

WHEREAS, Neither the Volunteer Transportation Network nor VTS really works hand in hand with the Beneficiary Travel Office; and

WHEREAS, This can lead to decreased efficiency in cost and coordination of patient transportation; and

WHEREAS, Service-connected and other veterans authorized beneficiary travel only receive $0.415 (41.5 cents) per mile, and are subject to $3.00 per one-way trip, $6.00 for a round trip with a maximum deductible of $18.00 per calendar month; and

WHEREAS, Eligible veterans are not reimbursed at a reasonable level for costs incurred to visit a VA medical facility for service-connected or other authorized care and treatment; and

WHEREAS, Beneﬁciary travel pay was never intended to pay actual transportation costs, such as authorized by the government for Federal employees, but instead, provided to help deﬁray costs; and

WHEREAS, There are no provisions in law that VA must increase the per mile travel authorization on a regular basis; and

WHEREAS, The beneﬁciary travel program is discretionary and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required to review the program annually to determine the VA’s ability to maintain the program and its ability to increase the reimbursement rate for eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has determined that it is necessary to maintain the current reimbursement rate in order to allow the VA health-care system to accommodate the increasing patient workload; and

WHEREAS, Mandatory funding for VA health care would allow the Secretary to increase the rate without negative consequences to funding for direct care; and

WHEREAS, The price of gasoline has steadily increased since the $0.41 rate was established, creating a financial hardship for veterans who have to travel long distances for care, or for those who have limited ﬁnancial resources; and

WHEREAS, The lack of a consistent and reliable mechanism to periodically adjust the per mile authorization for beneﬁciary travel creates an injustice and an unfair economic burden to many veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to seek adequate funding to accommodate the needs of the increasing demand for care, to include the need for a Veterans Transportation System (VTS), accompanied by an increase in the beneﬁciary travel rate; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide dedicated funds for both beneﬁts travel and VTS; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA co-locate VTS and the Beneﬁciary Travel Ofﬁce to develop transportation departments at the VA medical centers; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to authorize the VA to establish Memorandums of Understanding with state and local government properties with respect to federal government vehicles used for the purpose of transporting veterans to and from the VA medical facilities; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to periodically adjust the rate to assure that the per mile reimbursement rate is increased at a reasonable and acceptable level.

Resolution No. 63: Department of Veterans Affairs Choice Program
Origin: Nevada
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides health care to America’s veterans; and
WHEREAS, Not all Veterans Affairs medical centers are able to provide all levels of diagnostic modalities; and
WHEREAS, Veterans Affairs medical centers not having necessary diagnostic capabilities must refer patients to other medical facilities having the required capabilities; and
WHEREAS, The Choice Program was created as a temporary measure to reduce the backlog of time veterans wait while needing diagnostic and other medical services; and
WHEREAS, As intended, the Choice Program offers veterans an opportunity to choose non-VA medical care through the Choice Program when wait-times are too long; and
WHEREAS, Due to veteran’s non-use of the Choice Program, Congress has mandated VA to first refer veterans to the Choice Program when required diagnostic procedures or treatment modalities are not available at a VA medical center; and
WHEREAS, The VA is required to refer veterans to the Choice Program for outpatient services not available at the VA medical center at which the veteran is enrolled; and
WHEREAS, VA medical centers are provided funding for Non-VA health care to allow for referral of veterans to local health-care providers in addition to the “fenced funding” for the Choice Program; and
WHEREAS, The reimbursement rate paid through the Choice Program is less than the Medicare reimbursement rate and the frequent delays in reimbursement experienced by the non-VA providers to whom veterans are referred through the Choice Program result in non-VA health-care providers choosing to bill the veteran and the veteran’s insurance directly, rather than billing the Choice Program, resulting in veterans being billed for amounts in excess of the amounts that would be billed to the Choice Program or at a VA medical center based upon the veteran’s priority group; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Congress to amend the Choice Program to prevent veterans from being billed in excess of what they would be billed at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center based upon their priority group; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress amend existing legislation to prevent Choice Program health-care providers from directly billing the veteran or Medicare without having first billed the Choice Program; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Congress to amend the Choice Program to allow VA medical centers to manage “fenced” Choice Program funding that is not being used in addition to available non-VA care funding to allow for referral of veterans to the necessary outpatient health care.

Resolution No. 64: Department of Veterans Beneficiary Travel Program
Origin: Nevada
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides health care to America’s veterans; and
WHEREAS, Smaller Veterans Affairs medical centers are not able to provide all levels of diagnostic and definitive treatment modalities; and

WHEREAS, Existing beneficiary travel regulations provide for transportation from Veterans Affairs medical centers not having necessary diagnostic and treatment capabilities to Veterans Affairs medical facilities having those capabilities; and

WHEREAS, After having received necessary treatment and having been discharged from a distant Veterans Affairs medical facility, under existing beneficiary travel regulations, the discharged veteran is ineligible to receive travel expenses to return to the veteran’s home or the Veterans Affairs medical center that provided transportation to the distant Veterans Affairs medical center; and

WHEREAS, The veteran, discharged from the distant Veterans Affairs medical center, must assume the financial obligation for return travel to the veteran’s home or to the Veterans Affairs medical center that was unable to provide the necessary treatment, causing a financial burden to the veteran; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to seek adequate funding to accommodate the needs of the increasing demand for care, to include the need for providing return travel for veterans who have been transferred to distant Veterans Affairs medical centers for treatment, and subsequently discharged; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to revise beneficiary travel regulations to provide for return travel expenses for veterans discharged from distant Veterans Affairs medical centers from which they have been discharged, to include appropriate transportation and any supportive medications, medical devices and attendants as deemed necessary by the discharging facility; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to provided dedicated funds to Veterans Affairs medical centers to defray the cost for return travel to a veteran’s home or to the Veterans Affairs medical center that originally transferred a veteran to a distant Veterans Affairs medical center; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to periodically review the adequacy of funding for travel funding to insure veterans are not forced to bear the financial burden for return travel from distant Veterans Affairs medical facilities to which they have been transferred, and from which they have been discharged.

Resolution No. 83: Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record
Origin: Delaware
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, On April 9, 2009, President Obama provided direction to the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER), which would create a unified lifetime electronic record for members of the Armed Services; and

WHEREAS, The VLER plans to include administrative and medical information for servicemembers from when they first join the service throughout their lives until they are laid to rest; and

WHEREAS, The VLER plan seeks to expand the departments’ health information sharing capabilities by enabling access to private sector health data as well; and

WHEREAS, VLER is a federal, inter-agency initiative to provide portability, accessibility and complete health, benefits and administrative data for servicemembers, veterans and their beneficiaries; and

WHEREAS, DoD and VA for years have yet to fully implement a bilateral medical record between both agencies with no target end date in sight; and
WHEREAS, Approximately 2.6 million members of the military have served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn and are returning home in unprecedented numbers needing care for their injuries and illnesses sustained in service to our nation; and

WHEREAS, Failure to implement a bilateral medical record and VLER to date has caused significant delays in the veterans’ treatment process from DoD to VA because the VA treatment team does not have full access to the patient’s DoD records and have to rely on a patient’s self-report of their medical history and symptoms; and

WHEREAS, Servicemembers and veterans are forced to make copies of their records at their last duty station or submit a request to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, which can take months to process; and

WHEREAS, Veteran service organizations, such as The American Legion, have not been invited to VLER meetings to provide stakeholder input and sharing of mutual concerns; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has over 2,000 accredited department (state) and county veteran service officers that will continue to need access to Veteran Benefit Administration databases in order to file for VA benefits and claims for those claimants represented; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is concerned that within VA’s three branches – Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration – there are numerous computer-based programs that are inoperable between these branches which are not addressed in the VLER plan; and

WHEREAS, Because a bilateral medical record is not currently available, there is not an ability for a patient’s record to be flagged at the time of injury/illness occurred during military service, which makes it difficult and more time-consuming for DoD/VA physicians and raters to find proof of service connection; and

WHEREAS, Currently VA has the ability to send patients’ encrypted email messages and a VHA program, Myhealthevet, allows patients to refill their VA prescriptions, view their labs and receive VA wellness reminders but does not allow VA patients to schedule appointments online; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide oversight to the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) is fully implemented by Fiscal Year 2017; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge DoD and VA to implement VLER no later than FY 2015 to ensure returning servicemembers’ medical records are able to be accessed by both agencies which will improve the timeliness and delivery of VA health care and claims benefits; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommend the following be included in design and implementation of VLER:

• Include veterans service organizations, such as The American Legion, in VLER meetings to offer stakeholder input and sharing of mutual concerns;

• Allow servicemember records to be flagged at the time of injury/illness in the military to speed up processing of VA benefits (health care and claims) during and after discharge;

• Ensure computer systems and programs within the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration are interoperable and able to communicate with each other;

• Allow VA patients to be able to make appointments online by choosing the day, time and provider and that VA sends a confirmation within 24 hours.
Resolution No. 112: All Veterans Receive “Wartime” Benefits for Active Military Service Between February 28, 1961 and August 5, 1964

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Certain Department of Veterans Affairs benefits require wartime service by veterans; and
WHEREAS, The present dates for wartime service during the Vietnam War are August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975; and
WHEREAS, On November 10, 1997, Public Law 105-110 was signed by President Clinton; and
WHEREAS, This legislation amended the public law which established The American Legion (41 Stat. 285; 36 United States Code (USC) 45), approved September 16, 1919, by striking December 22, 1961, and inserting February 28, 1961; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always advocated the principle of equal benefits for equal service and believes that wartime service is not limited to only those who served in combat; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes the provision in section 101(29(A), title 38, USC, which limits entitlement to wartime benefits to those who served “in-country in the Republic of Vietnam” in the period February 28, 1961, to August 5, 1964, discriminates against those other veterans who served on active duty during this period, but who did not happen to have been stationed in Vietnam; and
WHEREAS, During these early years of the war in Vietnam, those serving on active duty in other parts of the world were a part of the build-up of military forces in Vietnam and were subject to transfer to Vietnam at any time; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall seek legislation to establish February 28, 1961, as the beginning date of the Vietnam War for Department of Veterans Affairs benefit purposes.

Resolution No. 114: Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Agreements with Non-VA Providers

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Non-VA care is health care provided within the community to eligible veterans when Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities cannot provide needed health care; and
WHEREAS, VA has a long history of purchasing non-VA health care services based on issuing individual authorizations or establishing provider agreements with non-VA geriatrics and extended care facilities, to include (community residential care, medical foster homes, adult family homes, and assisted living) as well as nursing homes such as: community living centers, community nursing homes, and state veterans homes; and
WHEREAS, Federal contracting laws and regulations (including the Federal Acquisition Regulation), requires that federal agencies adhere to such law and regulations, such as 48 Code of Regulations (CFR) Chapters 1 and 8; and
WHEREAS, The Competition in Contracting Act’s overriding mandate is for agencies to conduct “full and open competition” in government procurements, which is obtained by competitive procedures as listed in 41 United States Code (USC) 3301(a)(1); and
WHEREAS, Under federal contracting laws and regulations, only a government contracting official can make sole source purchases, under the limited circumstances listed in 41 USC 3304 (a) (1-7); and
WHEREAS, In March of 2015, it was reported that veterans residing at the Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska will no longer be allowed care at VA’s
expense because VA’s Office of General Counsel has issued a ruling that VHA can no longer issue provider agreements, and must adhere to the federal contracting laws and regulations; and

WHEREAS, This change in VHA policy will require VA to make arrangements for the purchase of non-VA health-care service by virtue of federal contracting laws and regulations, which does not take into account the veteran or family member preference; and

WHEREAS, If legislation is not enacted that would allow VA to enter into provider agreements with non-VA providers for necessary health-care service for the care and treatment of eligible veterans, many non-VA providers and nursing homes will be forced to discontinue accepting veterans into their programs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to enter into provider agreements with eligible non-VA providers to obtain needed health-care services for the care and treatment of eligible veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the VA be authorized to obtain health-care services from non-VA providers that are closer to where the veteran reside.

Resolution No. 115: Department of Veterans Affairs Recruitment and Retention
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion has consistently been concerned with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leadership, physicians and medical specialist staffing shortages within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA); and

WHEREAS, Since The American Legion’s System Worth Saving (SWS) program’s inception in 2003, The American Legion has tracked and reported staffing shortages at every VA medical facility across the country and shares those reports with Congress, VA Central Office (VACO), and the President of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that access to basic health-care services offered by qualified primary care, specialty care, and mental health-care providers should be available locally as often as possible; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion’s SWS 2014 executive summary found that several VA medical centers continue to struggle to fill critical leadership positions across multiple departments; and

WHEREAS, These gaps have caused communication breakdowns between medical center leadership and staff that work within these departments; and

WHEREAS, On January 30, 2015, the VA’s Office of Inspector General (VAOIG) released their determination of the “Veterans Health Administration’s Occupational Staffing Shortages,” as required by Section 301, of the “Veterans Access Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014”; and

WHEREAS, VAOIG’s report determined that the five occupations with the largest staffing shortages were medical officers, nurses, physician assistants, physical therapists, and psychologists; and

WHEREAS, VHA is still struggling to achieve the appropriate balance of primary care and medical specialists across the country; and

WHEREAS, If the VA continues to struggle with retention and recruitment, the trend of closures (or continued closures) for multiple departments within VA medical centers nationwide will continue; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation addressing the recruitment and retention challenges that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has regarding pay disparities among those
physicians and medical specialists who are providing direct health care to our nation's veterans; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the Veterans Health Administration continue to develop and implement staffing models for critical need occupations; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That VA work more comprehensively with community partners when struggling to fill critical shortages within VA’s ranks.

Resolution No. 117: Disability and Death Pension Program
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Public Law 95-588, the Veterans and Survivors Pension Improvement Act of 1978, provided major changes in the disability and death pension program for the veterans of World War I, World War II, the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars and their surviving spouses and children; and
WHEREAS, This pension program established different guaranteed annual income levels for necessary economic support; and
WHEREAS, After extensive study, The American Legion concludes that certain inequities exist in the Improved Pension program that need to be addressed by Congress; and
WHEREAS, Under the current Death Pension program, the annual benefit rate for a surviving spouse with no income and no dependents is $8,219 or about only two thirds of the amount received by a veteran with no income and no dependents; and
WHEREAS, Under the current Death Pension program, the annual benefit rate for a surviving child with no income where there is no surviving spouse is $2,093 or seventeen percent of the amount received by a veteran with no income or dependents; and
WHEREAS, The majority of these surviving spouses are elderly and disabled and are living below the poverty level; and
WHEREAS, Under title 38, United States Code, section 1543 where the surviving child is residing with a person who is legally responsible for such child’s support, the income and corpus of estate of that person is countable for the purposes of determining entitlement or continued entitlement to pension benefits; and
WHEREAS, Currently, when two veterans are married to one another where both meet the disability, service and income requirements, basic pension benefits are payable only at the rate of a “veteran with one dependent,” which is currently $16,051 annually; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that since each veteran in their own right meets the eligibility criteria for pension with the exception of being married to another veteran, this discriminatory provision of the law should be eliminated and each veteran should be paid at the basic pension rate of a single veteran without dependents which is $12,256, reduced by the amount of countable family income; and
WHEREAS, In the determination of annual income, payments under all Government Life Insurance programs are countable, but proceeds from fire and casualty insurance policies may be excluded; and
WHEREAS, Previous pension programs have excluded the proceeds of Government Life Insurance Policies in the determination of annual income; and
WHEREAS, Currently, the effective date of reduction or discontinuance of pension based on a change of income shall be the last day of the month in which the change occurred; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes it would lessen the financial hardship of such adjustments to pension if any such change would be made as of the last day of the calendar year in which the change occurred; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support amendments to title 38, section 1543, United States Code, to accomplish the following:

1. Establish the pension rates of surviving spouses at ninety percent of the rate for a veteran without dependents;
2. Establish the pension rate for a surviving child where there is no surviving spouse entitled at ninety percent of the rate of a veteran without dependents;
3. Delete the requirement that the income and corpus of estate of a person legally responsible for the support of a surviving child be counted in the determination of annual income of such child;
4. Provide that when two veterans, who meet the service, disability and income requirements for pension eligibility, are married to one another, each shall be paid at the rate of a single veteran without dependents reduced by the amount of countable family income;
5. Exclude in the determination of annual income payments all proceeds from Government Life Insurance policies;
6. Change the effective date for reduction or discontinuance of pension based on a change of income from the last day of the month in which the change occurred to the last day of the calendar year in which the change occurred.

Resolution No. 118: Environmental Exposures
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion has long been at the forefront of advocacy for veterans exposed to environmental hazards such as Agent Orange, Gulf War-related hazards, ionizing radiation and the various chemicals and agents used during Project Shipboard Hazard and Defense; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense’s disclosure of information regarding various potential hazardous exposures and the current advancement of scientific research continue to reveal new potential environmental threats to service members on an ongoing basis; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs was congressionally mandated by Public Law 102-4 (1991) to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to review existing peer-reviewed research on herbicides, to include their components, exposure and medical evidence on related health effects; and

WHEREAS, In the last several years new concerns have been raised regarding contamination of stateside and international military installations and locations such as, but not limited to: groundwater contamination at Camp Lejeune, NC; environmental contaminants at Gagetown, New Brunswick located in Canada; Fort Drum, NY; Fort Dugway, UT; post-hostility Vietnam; and Fort McClellan, AL; and

WHEREAS, Major overseas situations regarding exposures such as sodium dichromate in a water treatment facility in Qarmat Ali, Iraq, toxic exposures at the Naval Air Facility in Atsugi, Japan, dioxins and other contaminants at Johnston Atoll, and others; and

WHEREAS, On October 31, 2011, the Institute of Medicine released a report on the long-term health consequences from exposure to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, and currently determined that there is insufficient evidence at this point, but recommended further longitudinal studies over time to determine incidences of chronic diseases; and
WHEREAS, The importance of developing a comprehensive policy that allows for maximum flexibility to respond to new research as it becomes apparent in the timeliest and most proactive manner possible is recognized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion’s comprehensive policy on environmental exposures be an all-inclusive policy recognizing the traditions of previous advocacy on behalf of veterans exposed to environmental hazards; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide a full disclosure of all wartime and non-wartime locations to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) where hazardous environmental exposures exist and that armed forces members were exposed through testing, transportation, storage, disposal, and environmental contamination; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to enact legislation requiring the VA to establish a national center for the research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances during service in the Armed Forces and establish an advisory board, responsible for advising the national center, determining health conditions that result from toxic exposure and to study and evaluate cases of exposure; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the VA to expeditiously conduct peer reviews and scientific investigations through the National Academy of Sciences within the Institute of Medicine on all locations provided by the DoD; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That veterans reporting to VA medical care facilities claiming exposure to such environmental hazards be provided examinations and treatment which are thorough and appropriate, and that VA physicians demonstrate compassion in responding to the medical needs of these veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion vigorously advocate for the liberalization of the rules relating to the evaluation of studies involving exposure to any environmental hazard and that all necessary action be taken by the federal government, both administratively and legislatively as appropriate, to ensure that veterans are properly compensated for diseases and other disabilities scientifically associated with a particular exposure; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continue to closely monitor the development of all ongoing research on the long-term effects of all environmental exposures and point out to the proper officials any perceived deficiencies or discrepancies in these projects; and to ensure that government committees charged with review of such research are composed of impartial members of the medical and scientific community; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion will continue to consult with medical experts in order to ensure the effectiveness of its advocacy.

Resolution No. 119: Exempt Purple Heart and Medal of Honor Recipients from VA Prescription Co-Payment

Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Under the priority category system at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, those who were awarded the Purple Heart have been singled out as a special group of veterans deserving special consideration for their service and sacrifice to their country; and
WHEREAS, This special group of Purple Heart recipients has been placed in Priority Group Three; and
WHEREAS, Under the Caregiver Bill, veterans that were awarded the Medal of Honor were placed into Priority Group Three; and
WHEREAS, Priority Group Three veterans do not have to make any copayments for any of their inpatient or outpatient care; and
WHEREAS, These same veterans, if they are rated under 50% service-connected disabled or receive prescriptions for a non-service connected condition are charged an $8 copayment for each 30 day supply of medication; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to exempt all those who were awarded the Purple Heart and/or the Medal of Honor and are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system, from any copayment for prescription drugs.

Resolution No. 120: Extend Department of Veterans Affairs Mortgage Protection Life Insurance to Service-Connected Veterans Who are Permanently and Totally Disabled
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs Mortgage Protection Life Insurance is presently available to veterans entitled to the special adapted housing award under Section 2102 (a) of Title 38, United States Code; and
WHEREAS, Service-connected veterans rated as permanently and totally disabled cannot obtain Mortgage Protection Life Insurance through commercial insurance companies; and
WHEREAS, Their widows and dependents must bear an undue hardship upon the death of such veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion work with Congress to enact legislation which would extend the Veterans’ Mortgage Protection Life Insurance to service-connected veterans who are rated as permanently and totally disabled.

Resolution No. 121: Extend the Presumptive Period for Service Connection for Gulf War Veterans with Undiagnosed Illnesses
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, Thousands of Gulf War veterans still suffer from chronic unexplained physical symptoms; and
WHEREAS, Many servicemembers who have served in the Southwest Asia theater since the 1991 Gulf War, including those serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, have also been exhibiting chronic, unexplained physical symptoms; and
WHEREAS, The Gulf War Era has not been officially concluded; and
WHEREAS, There has recently been some progress in research on the long-term health effects of many of the agents Gulf War veterans were potentially exposed to during the Gulf War, but numerous symptoms experienced by sick Gulf War veterans are still not well understood, the causes of such symptoms remain elusive and answers could likely remain evasive for some time; and
WHEREAS, Additional research into the long-term health effects of exposures is needed, a fact confirmed by the Department of Veterans Affairs Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses; and
WHEREAS, The health effects from the Gulf Wars may not manifest until years after the service members’ service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge that legislation be enacted to reinstate and extend the presumptive period for service connection of Gulf War veterans with undiagnosed illnesses indefinitely.

Resolution No. 122: Gulf War Illnesses

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Approximately 700,000 members of the United States Armed Forces were deployed to the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations during the Gulf War; and
WHEREAS, More than 40,000 women served in theater during the Gulf War; and
WHEREAS, Approximately fifteen percent of the Armed Forces today are women and that percentage is likely to grow in the coming years; and
WHEREAS, The vast majority of Gulf War veterans are in good health, thousands of Gulf War veterans nevertheless suffer from unexplained physical symptoms known as “Gulf War veteran illnesses”; and
WHEREAS, Over 200 scientific studies are investigating these illnesses; and
WHEREAS, Few of the aforementioned studies are focused exclusively on the illnesses experienced by women Gulf War veterans; and
WHEREAS, Misleading information about Gulf War veterans’ illnesses has spread on the Internet and through the media, and this information has caused a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the severity and prevalence of Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; and
WHEREAS, The National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine is currently preparing reports that evaluate the nature, the likely causes and the federal government’s response to Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; and
WHEREAS, These reports directly affect Department of Veterans Affairs compensation programs for Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; and
WHEREAS, Several independent expert scientific committees and organizations have stated that a number of suspected causes of Gulf War veterans’ illnesses are not likely associated with those illnesses, whereas others are more likely associated with those illnesses; and
WHEREAS, The Secretary of Veterans Affairs established a committee comprised of doctors, scientists, Gulf War veterans and veteran service organization representatives to provide guidance and advice on future Gulf War-related research efforts; and
WHEREAS, Pyridostigmine bromide was used by the United States and some coalition troops as a nerve agent pre-treatment during the Gulf War although the Food and Drug Administration had not yet approved the drug for that use and some researchers contend that pyridostigmine bromide may be associated with Gulf War veterans illnesses; and
WHEREAS, Several medical studies have found that the unexplained physical symptoms reported by Gulf War veterans are similar to other medically unexplained symptom syndromes like chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and irritable bowel syndrome; and
WHEREAS, The President of the United States signed into law legislation amending the Gulf War undiagnosed illness law (title 38, United States Code, section 1117) to include medically unexplained disabilities such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and irritable bowel syndrome; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion’s contract with a medical consultant from the University of Connecticut proved invaluable in helping the organization strive towards its goal of serving Gulf War veterans; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourage the Department of Veterans Affairs to devote the appropriate resources to finding effective medical treatments to alleviate the unexplained physical symptoms of Gulf War veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Department of Veterans Affairs fund more scientific studies that exclusively investigate the health of women Gulf War veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the Department of Veterans Affairs to quickly implement any reasonable recommendations contained in Institute of Medicine reports, or recommendations offered by the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses, regarding its Gulf War veterans programs and research; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the scientific community to focus its efforts on the most likely causes of Gulf War veterans’ illnesses and to refrain from supporting or encouraging investigations of risk factors that are not likely related to Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the Department of Defense to not use investigational drugs on U.S. troops without their informed consent; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the Department of Veterans Affairs to closely monitor the implementation of the changes to title 38, United States Code, section 1117, to ensure proper application of the law at the Department of Veterans Affairs regional office level; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Department of Veterans Affairs continue to develop the Gulf War Registry; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion will continue to consult with medical experts from time to time in order to ensure the effectiveness of its advocacy.

Resolution No. 123: Increase the Transparency of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s Claim Processing

Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, The American Legion, while supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in its efforts to provide support to military veterans of the United States of America, recognizes the growing backlog of claims for disability and compensation submitted by military veterans; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has continued to challenge the VA to improve both the efficiency and accuracy with which veterans’ claims are processed; and

WHEREAS, Testimony by The American Legion before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs of the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, United States House of Representatives informed Congress that the VA continues to be inefficient and inaccurate in processing veterans’ claims for disability and compensation; and

WHEREAS, Even though bonuses for Senior Executive Service (SES) employees in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) have decreased from Fiscal Years 2009 to 2011, bonuses still average around $14,000 for SES employees in the VBA while the backlog of claims and inaccuracy of claims prepared by the VBA continued to increase; and

WHEREAS, The VBA continues its inefficiency and inaccuracy in processing valid veterans’ claims for compensation and pension and medical services without penalty for poor performance; and
WHEREAS, Military veterans who have submitted claims with required documentation continue to suffer from the denial of medical services and monetary compensation due to VBA inefficiency and inaccuracy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide, in a venue readily available to the citizens of the United States, a monthly report of the number of claims for compensation and disability that were submitted, claims that were granted/awarded, claims that were denied and claims that remain in a pending status; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion petitions Congress to pass legislation that requires VA be held accountable for achieving the VA Secretary’s stated goal to achieve an operational state for VA in which no claim is pending over 125 days and all claims have an accuracy rate of 98 percent or higher; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation requiring that any veteran whose claim is overturned on appeal be paid an amount, to be determined by Congress, which would be compounded daily, from the date of original submission of the claim; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation requiring that any veteran whose claim is overturned on appeal be paid an amount, to be determined by Congress, which would be compounded daily, from the date of original submission of the claim; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That bonuses for VA senior executive staff be tied to qualitative and quantitative performance measures developed by VA.

Resolution No. 124: Means Test for Married Veterans
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 266 (IL))

WHEREAS, United States Code, Title 38 § 1722, subsection (b) authorizes income thresholds for veterans eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care benefits; and

WHEREAS, Veterans enrolling in VA health care are authorized additional income thresholds for each dependent they have in qualifying for health-care benefits; and

WHEREAS, VA’s means test threshold for calendar year 2014 for a single veteran is $31,443 or less; and

WHEREAS, A veteran with one dependent, with that dependent being a veteran eligible to apply for VA health care, the financial means test threshold is also $37,733 or less for financial test year 2013; and

WHEREAS, A veteran married to a veteran, where both are eligible to enroll in VA health care, are penalized by the means test threshold by not having both of their honorable service recognized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, Sections 1722, subsection (b) to increase the income threshold of a veteran married to a veteran by two times the financial means test of a single veteran for the financial test year applied for enrollment into the Department of Veterans Affairs health-care system.
Resolution No. 125: Opening the Federal Supply Schedule for Pharmaceuticals to Medicare and Medicaid

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Federal Supply Schedule for Pharmaceuticals (FSS-P) is a schedule of pharmaceutical supply contracts awarded to responsible vendors supplying comparable products and services at fair and reasonable prices to the government; and

WHEREAS, FSS-P is essentially a price catalog of approximately 24,000 pharmaceutical products available to the federal government; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the largest purchaser of pharmaceuticals under FSS-P; and

WHEREAS, Pricing of pharmaceuticals to VA is at least 24% below and as much as 60% below drug manufacturers’ most favored non-federal, non-retail customer pricing; and

WHEREAS, Known as Federal Ceiling Prices (FCP), these prices are generally 14-20% lower than regular negotiated FSS-P prices; and

WHEREAS, Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that pays for medical assistance for individuals and families with low incomes and relatively few assets; and

WHEREAS, Numerous states encounter shortfalls in Medicaid funds and implement aggressive measures to control growth and curb expenditures, including prescription drug expenditures; and

WHEREAS, Beneficiaries of prescription drug benefits under Medicaid who also receive medical care under Medicare Parts A and B are known as “dual-eligible”; and

WHEREAS, “Dual-eligible” are mostly elderly poor who account for 34% of the enrolled Medicaid population, but 80% of the Medicaid drug bill; and

WHEREAS, “Dual-eligible” beneficiaries were automatically enrolled into the new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit; and

WHEREAS, In 1990, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (OBRA90) required drug manufacturers to provide rebates to state Medicaid programs for outpatient drug purchases in exchange for Medicaid reimbursement; and

WHEREAS, Manufacturers are willing to price FSS-P low because it accounts for a very small fraction of the total domestic drug market and because up to 70% of new doctors receive some residency training in medical school affiliated VA medical centers, thereby creating a continuous flow of loyal prescribers of their products; and

WHEREAS, When OBRA90 Medicaid rebates went into effect, manufacturers responded by raising FSS-P pricing to VA some 14%; and

WHEREAS, If federal legislation mandates that the new Medicare Part D drug benefit be tied to FSS-P, pharmaceutical manufacturers will act predictably to raise FSS-P prices to VA; and

WHEREAS, U.S. veterans in priority group 7 receiving VA medications on an outpatient basis are required to pay a co-payment of $8.00 for a 30-day supply of medication and veterans in priority group 8 are required to pay a copayment of $9.00 for a 30-day supply of medication would almost certainly end up paying more were VA to lose its protected FSS-P pricing; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has consistently opposed increases in prescription copayments in the past, arguing that corrections to other programs should not be made “on the backs of veterans”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion oppose any federal legislation that would open the Federal Supply Schedule for Pharmaceuticals to Medicaid, Medicare Part D, or any other entity or program not now specifically authorized to purchase on the Federal Supply Schedule for Pharmaceuticals.
Resolution No. 126: Oppose any Reduction of Eligibility Criteria for Department of Veterans Affairs Per Diem Payments to State Veterans Homes

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, State Veterans Homes were founded for indigent and disabled Civil War veterans beginning in the late 1800s and have continued to serve subsequent generations of veterans for over 100 years; and

WHEREAS, Today, there are more than 133 State Veterans Homes facilities in 49 states and Puerto Rico with over 30,255 total beds providing nursing home, hospital and domiciliary care; with more capacity being added annually; and

WHEREAS, The State Veterans Home Program has proven to be a cost-effective provider of quality care to many of the nation’s veterans; and

WHEREAS, This program is an important adjunct to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) own nursing, hospital and domiciliary programs; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code, authorizes VA per diem payments for veterans residing in State Veterans Homes; and

WHEREAS, There has been consideration of limiting the eligibility for inpatient long term (maintenance) care to veterans in Priority Groups 1 through 3 and Priority Group 4 veterans determined to be catastrophically disabled; and

WHEREAS, Such a change would cause thousands of veterans who are now eligible for per diem to become ineligible; and

WHEREAS, Such a change could cause financial disaster to many State Veterans Homes that now rely on VA per diem for revenue; and

WHEREAS, Such a change could result in a new population of elderly homeless veterans, especially in states that have poor Medicaid nursing home reimbursement rates; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall oppose any legislative proposal to reduce the eligibility criteria for Department of Veterans Affairs State Veterans Homes per diem.

Resolution No. 127: Prostate Cancer Research and Treatment

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer, other than skin cancer, among men in the United States and is second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer-related death among men; and

WHEREAS, One of six males will develop clinically significant prostate cancer in their lifetime; and

WHEREAS, The 2014 American Cancer Society Surveillance Research estimated that 233,000 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed, while 29,480 will die within the next year; and

WHEREAS, Prostate cancer has been demonstrated to be service-connected to Agent Orange exposure and, pursuant to the Agent Orange Act of 1991, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has determined that a presumption of service connection based on exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam is warranted for prostate cancer, in that VA has found a positive association between the condition and such exposure; and

WHEREAS, Advances in biomedical research are leading to new treatments and cures for all forms of cancer, and will lower long-term health care costs; and

WHEREAS, VA is very productive in advancing medical knowledge, improving health care for veterans and all other citizens; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That federal funding for prostate
cancer research, treatment, and therapies at the National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense, and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) be significantly increased and that Congress and the Administration re-double their efforts to find a cure for prostate cancer; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Veterans Health Administration increase its investment in prostate cancer clinical research by improving and accelerating clinical trials at VA hospitals and affiliated university medical centers and research programs.

Resolution No. 128: Protection of Religious Rights and Ceremonies at National Cemetery Administration National and State Cemeteries
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Some National Cemetery Administration national and state cemeteries do not allow graveside services that include a reference to God; and
WHEREAS, This policy is pursuant to a memorandum of the Undersecretary of Veterans Affairs for Memorial Affairs dated November 1, 2007; and
WHEREAS, This policy involves prior restraint of speech and religion in violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion and other veteran service organizations have challenged this policy in the United States District Court; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the National Cemetery Administration amend the November 1, 2007 memorandum of the Undersecretary of Veterans Affairs for Ceremonial Affairs on Honor Guard Funeral Flags to uphold and guarantee the freedom of all religious rights and ceremonies for veterans and their families at national and state cemeteries; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion petition Congress to support legislation guaranteeing the right that all religious rights and ceremonies be permitted at all national and state cemeteries; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support litigation against policies that violate the use of speech and religion in accordance with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Resolution No. 129: Provide the Department of Veterans Affairs the Ability to Purchase Medications Located Outside the United States
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, 41 U.S.C. Sections 10a-10d prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from purchasing pharmaceutical products manufactured in United States Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved facilities located in non-approved trading partner countries; and
WHEREAS, Since 2010, there have been an unprecedented number of VA pharmaceutical product shortages; and
WHEREAS, Some of these pharmaceutical products can be directly or indirectly linked to FDA product recalls while others cannot; and
WHEREAS, At times, even the manufacturer cannot or will not explain the reason for the shortage; and
WHEREAS, Outsourcing of pharmaceutical production, to areas outside of the U.S., is occurring at an increasing rate; and
WHEREAS, There are multiple instances of either primary product selection and/or secondary options that are only manufactured in countries from which the VA cannot purchase; and
WHEREAS, This forces the VA to either utilize costly brand name products or switch the veteran to a totally different product; and
WHEREAS, In almost all cases this procurement restriction has resulted in a higher cost to the VA, with no corresponding increase in quality; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion petition Congress to enact legislation to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs authority to purchase needed pharmaceuticals, manufactured in United States Food & Drug Administration approved facilities located outside the United States.

Resolution No. 130: Radiation Exposure
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code (USC), section 1112, lists various diseases which will be presumed to be service-connected in radiation-exposed veterans; and
WHEREAS, The term “radiation-exposed veteran” is defined as a veteran who participated in a radiation-risk activity while on active duty or inactive duty for training; and
WHEREAS, The term, “radiation-risk activity” is defined as involving onsite participation in an atmospheric nuclear weapons test, or the occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki during the period beginning on August 6, 1945, and ending on July 1, 1946, or internment as a POW in Japan during WWII which resulted in an opportunity for radiation exposure, or participation in underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, Alaska prior to January 1, 1974, or service at gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, Kentucky, Portsmouth, Ohio, or Oak Ridge, Tennessee; and
WHEREAS, Radiogenic diseases recognized as being presumed to be related to veteran’s exposure to radiation in service-listed in title 38, Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), section 3.309 - include various cancers that may manifest decades after exposure; and
WHEREAS, Title 38, CFR, section 3.311, requires The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to consider the circumstances of the veteran’s service and make a determination of whether the veteran’s disease resulted from the claimed exposure; and
WHEREAS, Such determinations are based heavily on an estimate of the veteran’s probable dose exposure; and
WHEREAS, It is well documented that because thousands of veterans who participated in the atmospheric nuclear weapons tests and various other radiation-risk activities did not have dosimetry badges, and record-keeping by the military and other federal agencies concerning individual and group exposures was poor, current radiation dose estimates have been arbitrary, unreliable, and inaccurate; and
WHEREAS, The VA’s continued use of questionable radiation dose estimates has caused the claims of thousands of radiation-exposed veterans to be denied; and
WHEREAS, Congress expressed concern about this problem in a provision of Public Law (PL) 106-419 requiring VA to conduct a two-year study of the radiation dose estimate program and report back to Congress; and
WHEREAS, Based on the lack of credible historic data as to the amount of radiation atomic veterans were actually exposed to, The American Legion believes this requirement in the regulations should be eliminated; and
WHEREAS, PL 106-398 included provisions amending the Radiation Compensation Act of 1990 to include workers in Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons-related programs who were exposed to radiation, beryllium, or silica; and
WHEREAS, Over the years, thousands of veterans have been assigned duty at various DOE nuclear weapons development, testing and manufacturing facilities, such as Hanford,
Washington, Oak Ridge, Tennessee and others, and would have been similarly at risk of exposure to radiation, beryllium, or silica; and

WHEREAS, The claim for a radiogenic disease or a disease related to beryllium, or silica by such veterans would be denied by VA, because their military duty does not meet the current definition of a radiation-risk activity in title 38 USC and proof of such exposure for direct service connection would be difficult if not impossible to obtain, nor do these veterans meet the eligibility criteria for benefits under the Radiation Compensation Act of 1990 as amended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek legislation to eliminate the radiation dose estimate requirement in claims of veterans who were exposed to ionizing radiation during their military service; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to recognize military duty at all Department of Energy nuclear weapons development, testing and manufacturing facilities as a “radiation-risk activity”; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to include title 38, United States Code, those diseases recognized for benefit purposes under the Radiation Compensation Act of 1990 as amended, including those resulting from exposure to beryllium and silica.

Resolution No. 131: Recognize Operations in Lebanon (1958), Grenada (1983), and Panama (1989-1990) as Periods of War for Department of Veterans Affairs Pension Purposes

Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Subsection 11 of section 101, title 38, United States Code (USC), defines “period of war” as the Spanish-American War, Mexican Border Period, World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Era, the Gulf War and the period beginning on the date of any future declaration of war by Congress and the ending on the date prescribed by Presidential proclamation or concurrent resolution of Congress; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, USC, section 1521 (a) provides that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shall pay pension to each veteran of a “period of war” who meets the length of service requirements specified in section 1521 (j) and who is permanently and totally disabled and who meets the income criteria in this section; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, USC, section 101 (6) recognizes that, for VA purposes, the dates for the “period of war” for the Spanish-American War (April 21, 1898, to July 4, 1902) also include service during the Philippine Insurrection, Boxer Rebellion, and service in the Moro Province from April 21, 1898, to July 5, 1903; and

WHEREAS, Operation “Blue Bat” in Lebanon, July 1, 1958, to November 1, 1958, Operation “Urgent Fury” in Grenada, October 23, 1983, and Operation “Just Cause” in Panama, December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990, are not qualifying service for pension or benefit purposes, under title 38, USC, definition of a “period of war”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Congress be urged to include in the definition of “period of war” in title 38, United States Code, sections 101 (11) and 1521, the following periods: the operations in Lebanon in 1958, Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989-1990 for the purpose of establishing entitlement to VA pension.
Resolution No. 132: Request Congress Provide the Department of Veterans Affairs Adequate Funding for Medical and Prosthetic Research

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical and Prosthetic Research Service is very productive in advancing medical knowledge and improving health care for veterans and all other citizens; and

WHEREAS, VA has developed the cardiac pacemaker, nicotine patch, the concepts that led to the Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT) scan, and other medical breakthroughs; and

WHEREAS, Basic biomedical research provides the most rational and cost-effective means of preventive health care and provides treatments and cures for many diseases; and

WHEREAS, Advances in biomedical research lead to the creation of new knowledge in biotechnology and serve as a successful model in lowering long-term health care costs; and

WHEREAS, In 1998, VA realigned its research priorities in response to recommendations of the department’s Research Realignment and Advisory Committee to better serve the needs of the veteran population; and

WHEREAS, The Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) is a venture undertaken by the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Service to establish a national system to translate research discoveries, innovation, effective and efficient diagnostic and treatment strategies into patient care; and

WHEREAS, QUERI is a comprehensive, data driven, outcome-based quality improvement program that will ensure excellence in all areas of Veterans Health Administration medical care: inpatient, outpatient and long-term care; and

WHEREAS, Continued research is urgently needed for many diseases if medical science is to overcome cancer, heart disease, AIDS, new strains of tuberculosis, mental illness, hepatitis and others, to help spare veterans and citizens from prolonged illness and permanent disabilities; and

WHEREAS, The need to reduce the nation’s budget deficit must not compromise the efforts to maintain and improve health productivity and develop new preventive and therapeutic procedures through the Department of Veterans Affairs and other government agencies; and

WHEREAS, It is essential that Congress and the Administration support strong medical and prosthetic research programs within VA so that veterans and all citizens continue to benefit from the exceptional research capability of the department; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support adequate funding for Department of Veterans Affairs biomedical research activities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress and the Administration encourage acceleration in the development and initiation of needed research on conditions that significantly affect veterans, such as prostate cancer, addictive disorders, trauma and wound healing, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, rehabilitation, and others, jointly with the Department of Defense, the National Institutes of Health, other federal agencies, academic institutions and the Department of Veterans Affairs.
Resolution No. 133: Revision of Work-Rate Standards for Department of Veterans Affairs Adjudicators

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) work-rate standards are based upon a series of work credits or End Products (EPs) that can be taken upon completion of work at the various stages in the processing of a claim; and

WHEREAS, This data is used to measure and evaluate each individual adjudicator’s performance as well as the station’s overall performance; and

WHEREAS, Under this type of system, the amount of work performed is measured in terms of the cumulative number of EPs reported without regard to whether the action taken, as indicated by the EP, was correct or proper; and

WHEREAS, Since all action, good and bad, receives the same amount of work credit, there is no incentive to do good quality work or disincentive to do poor quality work, which makes the use of these work credits prone to manipulation and abuse; and

WHEREAS, The use of a piecemeal approach to work measurement does not provide accurate or reliable information on the actual amount of work being performed, its quality, or the amount of time and resources needed to properly process a claim; and

WHEREAS, Without a fundamental change in the work measurement system, the Board of Veterans' Appeals will continue to be burdened with an inordinate number of unnecessary appeals, and veterans and their families forced to endure prolonged hardship while waiting for a final decision on their claim; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seeks legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Office adjudicators shall receive work credit under a system that integrates not only the quantity of work performed, but also the quality of work performed; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That such a work credit system adequately applies negative credit to work found to be in error, whether by decision overturned on appeal, through internal reviews within the VA, such as the Systematic Technical Accuracy Review, or by any other means that are applicable.

Resolution No. 134: Service Dogs for Injured Service Personnel and Veterans with Mental Health Conditions

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Thousands of American soldiers have sustained serious mental and physical injuries during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, Countless numbers of veterans continue to suffer from mental and physical injuries incurred on behalf of our country during prior conflicts; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, Congress authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to extend benefits for the upkeep of service and guide dogs used primarily for the aid of persons with physical disabilities and psychological wounds by amending 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 1714; and

WHEREAS, In the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated VA to conduct a five-year study on the effectiveness of service dogs for veterans with rated mental health disabilities as their primary diagnosis; and

WHEREAS, The VA does not issue a service or guide dog; and

WHEREAS, The VA will only provide a referral and once the dog has been certified, only the maintenance of the hardware with the exception of non-prescription dog food; and

WHEREAS, VA issued a proposed rule on 38 C.F.R. Part 17 to amend its policies and procedures directly related to veterans benefits and service dogs; and
WHEREAS, Veterans should have the same experience in a VA hospital as a private sector hospital with regards to the access of a service or guide dog, but currently do not; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion provided public comments on VA’s proposed rule on Monday, August 15, 2011, with concerns such as VA does not provide service dogs or money for service dogs, VA only provides benefits to veterans that already have a service dog a VA doctor deems medically appropriate, as well as VA’s selection of the standards set by the Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation for certification process; and

WHEREAS, 38 U.S.C. Section 1714 currently only states that the VA “may” provide service dogs for veterans with mental illnesses; and

WHEREAS, Eligibility for a veteran being issued a service dog is loosely defined and relies on clinical judgment and criterion which is not provided in this regulation and in the proposed rule VA states, “that trained dogs may provide valuable services to veterans diagnosed with certain mental illness, at this time VA does not have any scientific data to determine, from a purely clinical standpoint, whether or when service dogs are most appropriately provided to veterans with mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)”; and

WHEREAS, VA is promulgating regulations that do not clearly define the original Congressional intent of 38 U.S.C. Section 1714 that VA provide the benefits outlined by said section to qualified veterans, as outlined by 38 CFR 1705, with psychological disabilities as their primary VA diagnoses; and

WHEREAS, Many agencies provide service dogs or training for service dealing with mental or psychological disabilities specifically for veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD which are not included in the proposed rule; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to clearly define regulations and current eligibility requirements for a veteran to receive a referral for mental and/or physical conditions to pass legislation for clarification and of the original intent of Congress to VA as needed in order to ensure VA provides service and guide dogs to veterans with mental health illnesses; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion urge Congress to pass legislation to change the “may” to “shall” located in 38 U.S.C. Section 1714; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion urges VA to provide outreach and education to staff and veterans regarding the guide and service dog programs’ policies, procedures, and benefits; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion urges VA to mirror ADA standards or be less restrictive in regards to service and guide dogs; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The American Legion urges VA to more clearly define its regulations and current eligibility for issuance of service dogs to veterans with mental health illnesses; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA expand its list of agencies that can provide and accredit service dogs to veterans for the treatment of physical and mental conditions requiring the use of service and/or guide dogs, use during the three-year pilot study on the effectiveness of service dogs for mental health purposes and thereafter.
Resolution No. 135: State Veterans Homes' Extended Care Facilities Grant Program
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, State Veterans Homes were founded for veterans after the American Civil War and have ably served disabled veterans for nearly 150 years; and
WHEREAS, Every state operates at least one State Veterans Home, with one home in Puerto Rico, and more State Veterans Homes and beds and other programs within them are planned or projected annually to meet a growing demand for long term care programs and facilities for America’s elderly, sick and disabled veterans; and
WHEREAS, The State Veterans Home program has proven itself to be the most cost-effective source of high quality long-term health-care services for the nation’s veterans who need skilled nursing, domiciliary, adult day health care and other specialized programs to meet their needs; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) promotes the care and treatment of veterans in State Veterans Homes as an important means to attain its goal of developing, providing and maintaining the highest quality of care for eligible veterans; and
WHEREAS, Subchapter III of Chapter 81, Title 38, United States Code, authorizes the State Extended Care Facilities Grant Program, funded by VA through Congressional appropriations, to assist the states through grants for construction of new State Veterans Homes and for significant renovations of existing facilities, at a cost not to exceed 65% of the total cost of any such project proposed by a state and approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and
WHEREAS, VA has not kept up with the states’ pace of grant applications for construction of new State Veterans Homes and significant renovation and modernization projects at existing homes, resulting in a significant backlog of “Priority One” projects already funded by the States, within a total backlog of projects and new homes approaching $1 billion; and
WHEREAS, Congress appropriated $150 million in supplemental appropriations for the State Extended Care Facilities Grant Program, as a small increment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, H.R. 1, an act the President approved on February 17, 2009; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the National Association of State Veterans Homes in supporting full annual funding, at an amount based upon the Department of Veterans Affairs State Veteran Home Construction Program Priority List.

Resolution No. 136: Strategic Capital Investment Planning Program
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) program is a ten-year capital plan designed to address VA’s most critical infrastructure needs within the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration; and
WHEREAS, The SCIP plan evaluated gaps associated with space, access/workload, condition, safety, security, energy and other gap data needing to be reduced with major construction, minor construction, non-recurring maintenance, enhanced-use leasing, sharing, and other investments and disposal; and
WHEREAS, The SCIP plan has identified 4,808 capital projects that will be necessary to close gaps over a ten-year period with a cost between $53 and $65 billion with a current facility condition assessment deficiency cost of $10 billion; and
WHEREAS, The SCIP Plan does not include activation costs for facilities, which include staffing full-time employee equivalents and office furniture, which will be
additional costs incurred by the Veteran Integrated Service Network, VA Medical Center and allocated by other VA appropriations; and

WHEREAS, The Government Accountability Office report in January, 2011, VA Real Property: Realignment Progressing, but Greater Transparency about Future Priorities Is Needed, recommended, “VA annually provide to Congress the full results of its SCIP process and any subsequent capital planning efforts, including details on estimated costs of future projects”; and

WHEREAS, Under VA’s Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services planning process, The American Legion urged Congress to annually appropriate sufficient funds to fund the plan, however, VA was not given the $1 billion appropriation as intended; and

WHEREAS, Funding for VA’s major and minor construction programs have been consistently targeted for reductions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to provide increased appropriations annually to address Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) construction deficiencies and gaps identified by VA’s Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) program; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That VA include activation costs in their future SCIP cost projections and allocations so VA’s budget will not have to offset this lack of national funding; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA continue to be transparent about SCIP progress by publicly posting information about projects and costs on an annual basis.

Resolution No. 137: Support Legislation to Place Mariner Medal Recipients in Priority Group 3 for the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Qualified Merchant Marines are eligible for veterans benefits; and

WHEREAS, Congress authorized the Mariner's Medal, which was awarded to any seaman who while serving in a ship during the war period (World War II) was wounded, suffered physical injury, or suffered through dangerous exposure as a result of an act of enemy of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Enrollment levels for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care are set according to eight priority groups established by Congress; and

WHEREAS, Purple Heart and Medal of Honor recipients are accorded Priority Group 3 status for VA health care; and

WHEREAS, Recipients of the Merchant Medal should be accorded similar priority group status for VA health care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation that would place recipients of the Mariner Medal in the Priority Group 3 enrollment level for Department of Veterans Affairs health care.

Resolution No. 138: Support Medicare Reimbursement for the Department of Veterans Affairs

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides medical care to eligible beneficiaries as authorized by title 38, United States Code; and

WHEREAS, The fundamental branch of VA that administers and operates this medical care delivery system is the Veterans Health Administration (VHA); and
WHEREAS, VHA is the nation’s largest comprehensive, integrated health-care delivery system that provides excellence in health-care value, service, education and research; and

WHEREAS, The mission of VHA is to meet the medical needs of America’s veterans by providing specialized care, primary care and related medical and social support services for eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, VHA consists of hospitals, ambulatory clinics, nursing homes, domiciliaries and readjustment counseling centers located nationwide; and

WHEREAS, VHA continues to be the nation’s largest educator of health-care professionals through its affiliations with medical schools, academic medical centers and other research institutions; and

WHEREAS, VHA continues to be a major national research asset conducting basic, clinical, epidemiological and behavioral studies across the entire spectrum of scientific discipline; and

WHEREAS, VHA continues to serve as a contingency back up to Department of Defense medical services and, during national emergencies, supports the National Disaster Medical System; and

WHEREAS, Enrollment in VHA could be limited by the availability of existing annual federal discretionary appropriations to meet the health-care needs of enrolled veterans; and

WHEREAS, VHA continues to seek other revenue streams to supplement limited annual federal discretionary appropriations and meet the growing demands for quality treatment of enrolled veterans; and

WHEREAS, VHA is authorized to bill, collect and retain first party copayments from enrolled veterans and third party copayments from their health-care insurers, except Medicare, for inpatient and outpatient care, outpatient medications and long-term care services, and

WHEREAS, Medicare is a prepaid, federally mandated health insurance program for all eligible Americans; and

WHEREAS, VA is prohibited from billing and collecting Medicare reimbursements for the treatment of non-service-connected medical conditions of enrolled Medicare-eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, Indian Health Service has successfully demonstrated the ability to bill and collect Medicare reimbursement; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion’s GI Bill of Health proposes Medicare reimbursement for VA as a realistic health-care coverage for enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans seeking treatment of non-service-connected medical conditions in VHA health-care facilities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion advocate to Congress amending title XVIII of the Social Security Act, to allow Medicare Reimbursement for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on a fee-for-service basis for the treatment of non-service-connected medical conditions of enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That enrolled, Medicare eligible veterans be authorized to participate in the Medicare Advantage option by choosing VA as their primary health-care provider.
Resolution No. 139: Support Presumptive of Service Connection for Hepatitis C
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Hepatitis C is an easily transmittable blood-borne virus, which can result
in long term, potentially fatal health problems; and
WHEREAS, Because of the exposure risk factors directly related to military service,
veterans have a much higher incidence of Hepatitis C than the general population; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates 10 to 20 percent of
veterans currently have Hepatitis C, compared to under 2 percent for the general
population; and
WHEREAS, Vietnam veterans are the group most directly affected by the Hepatitis
C virus; and
WHEREAS, Many veterans who contracted Hepatitis C 25 or 30 years ago or more
in service are now showing signs of severe liver disease and 52 percent of the liver
transplants done by VA are for veterans with Hepatitis C; and
WHEREAS, In 85 percent of cases, no acute symptoms would have shown up at the
time of infection with Hepatitis C; and
WHEREAS, Military training and combat situations offer many opportunities for
transmitting the blood-borne Hepatitis virus through blood to blood contact; and
WHEREAS, No effective blood test for Hepatitis C was available until 1992; and
WHEREAS, Veterans with Hepatitis C who were treated for acute Hepatitis during
military service and who now claim service connection are generally denied by VA,
because they cannot prove the current Hepatitis C is related to the Hepatitis noted in
service; and
WHEREAS, The Board of Veterans’ Appeals often rejects claims for service
connection for Hepatitis C, because the veteran’s medical records do not show the presence
of Hepatitis C at time of discharge from service; and
WHEREAS, Because of the nature of this disease and the long latency period,
veterans who experience certain exposure risk factors in service, such as: blood transfusion
prior to 1992; exposure to blood on or through the skin or mucous membrane;
hemodialysis; experience of a needle-stick accident or medical event involving a needle,
not due to the veteran’s willful misconduct; a diagnosis of unexplained liver disease in
service; experience of an unexplained liver dysfunction or abnormal liver test; or duty as a
health-care position or specialty as prescribed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; should
be accorded a statutory presumption for the purpose of establishing entitlement to service
connection for Hepatitis C; and
WHEREAS, Service connection for Hepatitis C is important to veterans and their
families, since it entitles the veteran to compensation for any disability related to the
disease as well as necessary medical care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in
Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
strongly urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to expeditiously promulgate
regulations providing for presumptive service connection for Hepatitis C; and, be it

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to provide for a
statutory presumption of service connection for Hepatitis C under certain conditions
in service; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Veterans Affairs provide regular
notification to Congress, the veterans service organizations, and veterans on new
treatment modalities for Hepatitis C.
WHEREAS, State Veterans Home program, represented by 140 participating facilities within 50 states and in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, has proven itself to be the most cost effective resource available to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), for high quality long-term health-care services for those of the nation’s veterans who need skilled nursing, domiciliary care, adult day health care and other specialized long-term care programs to meet their needs; and

WHEREAS, VA promotes and closely monitors the care and treatment of veterans in State Veterans Homes as an important means to attain its goal of developing, providing, maintaining and guaranteeing options for the highest quality of long term care for eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, Each state is accountable for ensuring veterans in its State Veterans Homes receive quality long term and other health-care services, and for achieving high patient satisfaction and comfort in safe environmental conditions; and

WHEREAS, A State Veterans Home generally functions within a state’s department or division of veterans affairs, public health, or other accountable state agency, and operates under the governance and oversight of a board of trustees, a board of visitors or other similar accountable public body; and

WHEREAS, State Veterans Homes hold themselves accountable for the quality of care they provide through myriad internal management controls, state and federal long-term care regulations, and integration of model policies, practices and standards advocated by the National Association of State Veterans Homes and other standards bodies, for the continuous quality improvement of their programs of care for sick, elderly and disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, State Veterans Homes are subject to both regular and periodic inspections and audits from state agencies, the federal Department of Health and Human Services, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, among other inspectors, and are accountable to the general public through the press and news media; and

WHEREAS, Surveys by state agencies and the federal Department of Health and Human Services already hold State Veterans Homes to the same and more conditions and standards of care as the VA, with the exception of eight VA unique and primarily administrative criteria; and

WHEREAS, In the Memorandum on VA Inspections of State Veterans Homes dated June 6, 1996, the VA Under Secretary of Health instructed the deputy secretary to modify relevant sections of the Veterans Health Administration Administrative Manual to ensure that State Veterans Homes that are accredited/certified (without waivers) by either the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) or the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) are exempted from annual VA inspections unless there is good reason to believe that the State Veterans Home is not substantially in compliance with the current VA standards, likewise, non-JCAHO or non-HCFA certified State Veterans Homes may be exempted if they are licensed by the state inspection standards and the state standards approximate VA standards; and

WHEREAS, In the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, issued on January 21, 2009, the President instructed the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to issue an open government directive to direct executive departments and agencies to take specific actions to implement the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration to improve the effectiveness of government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the federal government, across levels of government, and between the government and private institutions; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the consolidation of the duplicitous inspection process and that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), where applicable, combine their surveys into one inspection or defer to the CMS inspection results, except for those unique VA criteria, to assure that State Veterans Homes function within required standards and fulfill their roles as effective, safe and high quality sources of compassionate care for eligible sick and disabled veterans and their dependents and survivors.

Resolution No. 141: Department of Veterans Affairs Enhanced-Use Leasing  
Origin: Maryland  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  

WHEREAS, Formerly under the provisions of Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), Chapter 81, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is authorized to lease real property under the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) jurisdiction or control to a private or other public entities for a term of up to 75 years; and

WHEREAS, The Enhanced-Use Leasing (EUL) activity must either: “(i) contribute to the mission of VA; be consistent with, and not adversely affect VA’s mission; enhance the use(s) of the property to be leased; and be in exchange for fair consideration to VA as determined by the Secretary; or (ii) result in a demonstrable improvement in services to eligible veterans in the geographic service-delivery area in which the property is located”; and

WHEREAS, “As part the fair consideration to be provided in exchange for the EUL, the Secretary is authorized to accept “in-kind” consideration such as facilities, office, storage, or other usable space, services, money, and/or other “in-kind” consideration”; and

WHEREAS, The Building Utilization Review and Repurposing Initiative, which cannot be enacted without the EUL program, was started by the VA in order to meet the needs of homelessness, but does not address other needs of the veterans community; and

WHEREAS, There are other needs that the veterans have to include but not limited to: adaptive sports, women veteran health care, mental health, and rural health care; and

WHEREAS, VA has repeatedly negotiated agreements involving use of VA assets with business and organizations without contact or discussion with, or seeking input and involvement from, veterans' service organizations and stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, Third party organizations that engaged in EULs with the VA were not held to the reporting requirements as the VA, which will aide in communications with the Chief Business Office; and

WHEREAS, Congress did not reauthorize the Department of Veteran Affairs Enhanced-Use Leasing in November 2011; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion petition Congress to reauthorize the use of Enhanced-Use Leasing (EUL) for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress restricts the EUL capabilities to a priority list of services that will meet the needs of the veteran community; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA require outside organizations to follow the same reporting procedures as the government in order to ensure effective communication with the Chief Business Office; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports a publicly transparent Enhanced Use Lease process in consultation with veteran service organizations and stakeholders; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose any EUL that does not specifically provide any obvious and permanent benefits, resources or services to the veterans’ community.

Resolution No. 142: Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has a substantial mental health population; and
WHEREAS, According to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, of the returning Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans who have sought care at VHA facilities, mental health problems are the second most common medical problem of these war veterans; and
WHEREAS, There has been significant restructuring of VA mental health services during the past several years; and
WHEREAS, This restructuring has often resulted in a downsizing of in-patient based care, and the shift of treatment programs from residential-based to ambulatory-based programs; and
WHEREAS, There has not been a commensurate reinvestment of resources in alternative treatment modalities to maintain community-based mental health services to treat veterans who were deinstitutionalized by the closure of inpatient programs; and
WHEREAS, During the past several years, the number of veterans provided specialized substance abuse treatment has declined, while the funding for such treatment has been significantly decreased; and
WHEREAS, Since the restructuring, the Veterans Health Administration now has more mental health patients seeking treatment with fewer mental health providers; and
WHEREAS, Veterans continue to need increased access to mental health services, including, but not limited to, community based outpatient clinics, mental health intensive case management, substance abuse disorder programs, and compensated work therapy programs; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the Mental Health Strategic Plan; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to annually appropriate sufficient funds for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure comprehensive mental health services are available to veterans; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide annual oversight of VA’s mental health services.

Resolution No. 143: Department of Veterans Affairs Nursing Home Capacity
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) long-term care has been the subject of discussion and legislation for nearly twenty years; and
WHEREAS, In a landmark July 1984 study, Caring for the Older Veteran, it was predicted that a wave of elderly veterans had the potential to overwhelm VA’s long-term care capacity; and
WHEREAS, The recommendations of the Federal Advisory Committee on the Future of Long-Term Care in its 1998 report, VA Long-Term Care at the Crossroads, made recommendations that serve as the foundation for VA’s national strategy to revitalize and reengineer long-term care services; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 106-117, the Millennium Act, enacted in November 1999, required VA to continue to ensure 1998 levels of extended care services (defined as VA nursing home care, VA domiciliary, VA home-based primary care, and VA adult day health care) in its facilities; and
WHEREAS, The Millennium Act specifically requires VA to maintain its in-house nursing home care unit bed capacity at the 1998 level of 13,391; however, VA has never met this mandate; and
WHEREAS, Recent General Accounting Office reports show that VA has failed to fully implement mandates of the Millennium Act that would expand non-institutional long-term care services; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should be required to restore its nursing home care unit capacity as intended by Congress to the 1998 level of 13, 391; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That VA must create incentives and receive appropriate funding to maintain its nursing home care unit beds rather than abandon them to alternative sources; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That VA be prohibited from counting any but their own nursing home care unit beds for the purposes of compliance with the provisions of Public Law 106-117, the Millennium Act; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That Congress should appropriate sufficient funds to support the provisions of the non-institutional long term care mandates of Public Law 106-117, the Millennium Act, so that VA is not forced to reduce its nursing home care unit capacity in order to comply with said non-institutional care mandates.

Resolution No. 144: Department of Veterans Affairs Pharmacy Benefits
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) basic Medical Benefits Package includes prescription drugs and supplies; and
WHEREAS, VA has experienced unprecedented demand for prescription drugs since open enrollment in 1998; and
WHEREAS, By law (Public Law (P. L.) 101-508 and P. L. 106-117) VA must charge veterans a copayment for each 30-day or less supply of medication provided on an outpatient basis for the treatment of a non-service-connected condition; and
WHEREAS, The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (P. L. 106-117) authorized VA to increase the copayment amount and to establish an annual cap on the amount of medication copayment charged; and
WHEREAS, VA increased the amount of the copayment from $2.00 to $7.00 dollars effective February 4, 2002; and from $7.00 to $8.00 in 2005; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion opposed the pharmacy copayment increases citing alternative options; and
WHEREAS, The Office of Inspector General reported an audit of VA regarding pharmacy copayment levels and restrictions on filling privately written prescriptions for priority group 7 veterans in December 2000; and
WHEREAS, This report raised the issue that the indirect cost of re-writing private prescriptions that are filled by VA physicians can exceed the direct cost of the prescriptions themselves; and
WHEREAS, VA’s policy to fill only prescriptions written by VA physicians and the processes that have been developed to comply with this policy affects all veterans receiving or eligible to receive VA health care; and
WHEREAS, VA has been unable to provide all enrolled veterans with services in a timely manner and this has generated interest in filling prescriptions from outside providers; and

WHEREAS, Various legislative proposals have been offered to grant VA the authority to provide veterans with pharmaceuticals prescribed by physicians or other health care professionals who have no affiliation with VA; and

WHEREAS, VA is a managed health-care system that requires enrollment; and

WHEREAS, Authorizing VA to fill prescriptions from a private sector physician without the veteran enrolling would fundamentally change the system; and

WHEREAS, VA provides medications and pharmaceutical supplies to veterans, with limited exceptions, only in the course of providing medical care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion oppose significant pharmacy copayment increases at the expense of veteran beneficiaries, in lieu of seeking alternative funding sources, such as mandatory funding and Medicare reimbursement, that would generate and provide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with more adequate system-wide funding; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support the provision of VA Pharmacy Benefits to enrolled veterans only when prescribed by an authorized VA physician or provider in the course of providing them medical care.

Resolution No. 145: Veteran Treatment Courts
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, When veterans return from combat, some turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with mental health issues as a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI); and

WHEREAS, An unfortunate number of veterans are entering the criminal justice system to face charges stemming from these issues; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, a judge in Buffalo, NY, created the first Veterans Treatment Court after seeing an increase in veterans’ hearings on his dockets; and

WHEREAS, Veteran Treatment Courts are hybrid drug courts and mental health courts and have evolved out of the growing need for a treatment court model designed specifically for justice-involved veterans to maximize efficiency and economize resources while making use of the distinct military culture consistent among veterans; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans that enter the veteran treatment courts are not aware of their federal, state, county and a variety of additional benefit programs, in particular, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits for compensation, pension and health care; and

WHEREAS, Grouping justice-involved veterans into a specific court docket significantly expedites access to veteran-specific resources, including benefits and treatment earned through military service; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs sent a memorandum to the 152 VA Medical Centers recommending that a Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Coordinator be established at each of the VA Medical Centers nationwide to provide veterans with assistance in Veteran Treatment Courts and connect these veterans with VA benefits and assistance; and

WHEREAS, Currently, VA has not established a national Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive on the VJO program and a single staff person manages this program under the auspices of the VHA Homeless Office; and

WHEREAS, Only 120 of the 153 VA Medical Centers nationwide currently have VJO coordinators and their schedules are inconsistent in coverage of veteran treatment courts
necessitating the need for national oversight, funding and clearly established policies and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, Veteran service organizations, such as The American Legion, can assist these veterans in the Veteran Treatment Courts in pursuit of their VA claims and benefits or volunteering to help connect them with resources and assistance; and

WHEREAS, Veterans deeply value their military experience and share an inimitable bond among their peers and Veteran Treatment Courts build upon this camaraderie by allowing participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences, and pairing veterans with volunteer veteran mentors; and

WHEREAS, Veteran Treatment Courts are able to better serve veterans and are greatly enhanced when American Legion department service officers are involved with the court process; and

WHEREAS, Justice For Vets, in coordination with the National Drug Court Institute, both professional service organizations of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, a 501(c)3, non-for-profit organization, serves as the national clearinghouse for Veteran Treatment Courts and ensures Veteran Treatment Courts receive the proper training and technical assistance to be successful; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to continue to fund the establishment and expansion of Veteran Treatment Courts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a separate program office within VA Central Office with an increased program budget and hiring of staff to expand the Veterans Justice Outreach program and policies; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion work with Justice for Veterans, at no cost to The American Legion, to provide training to The American Legion department service officers and American Legion volunteer veteran members interested in creating and/or supporting a Veteran Treatment Court in each appropriate community; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommends the various departments and posts provide non-monetary assistance and support to veteran treatment courts by having department service officers serve on the Veteran Treatment Court or having volunteers provide information on VA benefits and services.

Resolution No. 146: Veterans Receive Same Level of Benefits
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a membership organization founded in 1919 on the common bond of wartime service during any active U.S. period of war; and

WHEREAS, The United States Code (U.S.C.) § 101, unfairly categorizes servicemembers and veterans by dates of service and/or theater of operations; and

WHEREAS, Due to this injustice, veterans from different eras and theaters of operations are receiving different levels of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits based solely on their dates and locations of service, rather than their honorable service; and

WHEREAS, For example, the Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 recently passed by both chambers of Congress created two distinct caregiver support programs, providing a stipend to caregivers of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans, but not to caregivers of veterans from previous eras; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always advocated on the principle of equal benefits for equal service; and
WHEREAS, All veterans of the United States are all united by the common bond of service and all took an oath of service to preserve, protect and defend the country; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide the same level of benefits for any veteran, regardless of the dates or theater of operations during their military service; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress review current legislation and public laws to ensure that veterans benefits are provided equitably and consistently for all veterans from the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as those veterans from previous eras and conflicts.

Resolution No. 147: Women Veterans
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The total women veteran population in the United States and its territories as of January 2015 is 2,020,077; and
WHEREAS, Women veterans are the fastest growing demographic serving in the military, and enrolling in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for their health-care treatment; and
WHEREAS, Since 2000, women veterans receiving health care from VA has doubled from 159,000 to 337,000 and these numbers are expected to grow because of the increasing numbers of women veterans in the military that will be eligible for VA health-care enrollment and services; and
WHEREAS, Women veterans face many barriers and challenges with enrolling for and receiving their VA care due to a number of reasons such as: not identifying as a veteran; not being recognized as a veteran by VA employees and staff; lack of awareness and understanding of their VA health-care benefits; and the stigma and perceptions that VA is an “all-male” health-care system; and
WHEREAS, According to VA, women veterans are 30 percent less likely to enroll for health care than their male counterparts, which is as a result of many factors that include, but are not limited to: lack of awareness of benefits, fragmentation of care from limited access to gender specific care (OB/GYN, Mammography), and obtaining compensation benefits through the Veterans Benefits Administration; and
WHEREAS, The VA only dedicated .5 full time employee (1/2 of 1 employee's time) in order to coordinate outreach and conduct analysis at the Veteran Service Integrated Network (VISN) level; and
WHEREAS, In 2009, the Government Accountability Office conducted a study that identified a number of challenges VA faced in their delivery of health care to women veterans including: space constraints (i.e. configuration of exam rooms, bathrooms and privacy needs) and hiring providers with specific training and experience in women’s health care, in particular with mental health for treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Military Sexual Trauma (MST); and
WHEREAS, In 2011, The American Legion conducted a Women Veterans Survey with 3,012 women veterans in order to better understand their health care needs through VA; and
WHEREAS, The survey found while there were improvements in the delivery of VA health care to women veterans, challenges with service quality in the following areas remained: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, access and understanding; and
WHEREAS, Female servicemembers have been allowed entry into previous male specified military occupations, such as combat arms support jobs, have assumed more leadership positions and have increased presence conducting hazardous occupations; and

WHEREAS, According to the 2012 Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Task Force Report, a higher percentage of female veterans (22%) are diagnosed with mental health problems; and

WHEREAS, According to the VA, one out of every five women veterans using the VA health-care system screen positive for military sexual trauma; and

WHEREAS, MST is associated with a range of health and economic consequences such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, higher levels of depression, eating disorders, anxiety, adjustment disorders, sexually transmitted infections, genitourinary problems, substance abuse disorders, and homelessness; and

WHEREAS, Women veterans suffering from PTSD as a direct result of MST face significant odds when applying for disability compensation from the Veterans Benefits Administration even though research shows that women veterans disproportionately file for PTSD claims based on MST; and

WHEREAS, A 2010 decision by the VA to relax the evidentiary standards for PTSD applies only to combat veterans or those exposed to hostile fire, but specifically excludes PTSD diagnosed as a result of MST; and

WHEREAS, Currently, beyond the effects of PTSD, there remains limited data to show the long-term effects of combat on women veterans; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, it was reported that VA has been distributing male prosthetics devices to women veterans due to the lack of customized prosthesis; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) establishment of a women veterans awareness training program that educates employees about the changing roles of women in the military, their combat-related exposures and Military Sexual Trauma (MST) sensitivity; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion work with the VA in order to ensure that the needs of the current and future women veteran populations are met; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA significantly increases the amount of outreach to women veterans through awareness campaigns, benefits education, and community organizations; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA dedicate one full-time employee at the Veterans Integrated Service Network level in order to analyze data on women veterans and to help women veterans program managers conduct outreach; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA provides full comprehensive health services for women veterans department-wide, including, but not limited to, increasing treatment areas and diagnostic capabilities for female veteran health issues, improved coordination of maternity care, and increase the availability of female therapists/female group therapy to better enable treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from combat and MST in women veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA conduct long-term studies in order to show the impact of combat on women veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the VA furnish gender-specific prosthetic appliances, orthotics, services and eliminate the male-only approach to treatment of all injuries and illnesses.
Resolution No. 148: Oppose Legislation Authorizing Legion-Accredited Representatives to Develop Claims Directly on Behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, There are almost 23 million veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Currently, there are approximately 685,686 veterans who have some type of action pending on their claims by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, Approximately 405,938 of those claims are over six months old; and

WHEREAS, In addition, there is a growing backlog of pending appeals, which is now over 267,002 cases, as well as approximately 18,000 remanded cases at the Appeals Management Center; and

WHEREAS, Appeals are, by definition, among the oldest claims in the system and reflect the claimant’s belief that they have not received a fair or proper decision; and

WHEREAS, The nation’s veteran population is dying at a rate of over 1,300 veterans a day; and

WHEREAS, Proposed legislation to reduce the backlog of veteran’s claims at VA was previously introduced in the United States House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Under currently proposed legislation, a pilot program, establishing an official federally funded arrangement between county veteran service officers and VA in five states (California, Florida, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas), with the potential of expanding to other states upon the request of a county veterans service officer in such a state, would be created in order to eliminate the backlog of claims for veterans benefits; and

WHEREAS, Many county veterans service officers are, in fact, accredited representatives of The American Legion and employed by local municipalities; and

WHEREAS, The proposed legislation would allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to choose a county veterans service office for development of a claim based upon the office’s geographical proximity to the claimant; and

WHEREAS, County veterans service officers are already working long hours to assist veterans and eligible dependents in the application for, administration of, or receipt of benefits under any federal, state, or county veterans benefits program; and

WHEREAS, The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, under this program, would refer claims to the county veterans service officer for specific development as specified by the Secretary; and

WHEREAS, Claims submitted to the county veterans service officer under this program would be treated, for receipt of claim purposes, as if submitted to VA; and

WHEREAS, VA referrals to a county service officer imply a dual role, that of advocate for the veteran and VA adjudicator of the veteran all at the same time; and

WHEREAS, This dual role would essentially make the county service officer a quasi-VA employee, creating an inherent conflict of interest between the county service officer’s role as a veterans advocate and his/her function as a quasi-employee of VA; and

WHEREAS, VA referrals could jeopardize the veteran service officer confidentiality and even violate the Privacy Act and power of attorney relationship; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion adamantly oppose any federal legislation requiring an accredited representative of The American Legion to develop claims on behalf of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under a contractual arrangement between VA and county or state government or under any other arrangement where the representative would be acting in an official capacity directly on behalf of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
Resolution No. 160: Complementary and Alternative Medicine
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to treatments not considered to be standard in the current practice of Western Medicine; and
WHEREAS, In some locations, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide CAM, such as: acupuncture, biofeedback, art therapy, tai chi, medication, breathing exercises, massage, and yoga; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion’s Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Committee was formed in 2010 in order to investigate the existing science and procedures and alternative methods for treating TBI and PTSD not currently being employed by the DoD or VA for the purpose of determining if such alternative treatments are practical and efficacious; and
WHEREAS, In the wake of serious concerns about over prescription of medications at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the nation has become more focused on ensuring veterans and servicemembers are treated properly with opioid medications and do not suffer due to mixed drug toxicity; and
WHEREAS, CAM treatments should not be limited to treatment of veterans suffering from TBI and PTSD; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide oversight and funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for innovative, evidence–based, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in treating various illnesses and disabilities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legions urges legislation that would improve pain management policies for the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That DoD and VA accelerate research efforts to properly diagnose and develop CAM treatments as evidence-based.

Resolution No. 161: Agent Orange Presumption for Service in Southeast Asia Since 1975
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Agent Orange was the most common herbicide used in Southeast Asia by the U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War from 1962-1971; and
WHEREAS, According to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, U.S. military forces sprayed over 19 million gallons of herbicide over Vietnam; and
WHEREAS, Agent Orange was contaminated by the carcinogen dioxin- 2, 3, 7, 8 tetrachlorodibenzo--dioxin (TCDD); and
WHEREAS, Over 2 million veterans served in Vietnam during the Vietnam War and are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange; and
WHEREAS, A significant number of Vietnam veterans have developed various cancers, neurological disorders, liver dysfunction and other severe diseases; and
WHEREAS, Current law 38 USC Sec. 1116 and 38 CFR 3.307 state a veteran who, during active military served in the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962 and ending on May 7, 1975 shall be presumed to have been exposed during such service to an herbicide agent; and
WHEREAS, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) was activated on October 1, 2003, created from the merger of the 30-year-old U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory - Hawaii and the 11-year-old Joint Task Force – Full Accounting, which replaced the 19-year old Joint Casualty Resolution Center; and
WHEREAS, Commanded by a flag officer, JPAC is manned by approximately 400 handpicked soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Department of the Navy civilians; and
WHEREAS, JPAC maintains three permanent overseas detachments and are assigned active duty servicemembers; and
WHEREAS, Detachment Two is stationed in Hanoi, Vietnam and routinely carries out day-to-day operations involving investigating leads, recovering and identifying Americans who were killed in action but never brought home; and
WHEREAS, Hatfield Consultants, out of North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; and the Office of the National Steering Committee 33 Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, out of Hanoi, Vietnam, have performed multiple environmental and human health assessments of dioxin contamination in Vietnam as late as 2011; and
WHEREAS, Significant quantities of TCDD were detected in soil samples in December 2006, January 2008 and 2010; and
WHEREAS, A Hatfield Consultants report dated April 2007 states, “The present study (and previous work by Hatfield/10-80 Division of the Ministry of Health [1998, 2000, 2003,2005]) has verified that the highest concentrations of Agent Orange dioxin in soils/sediments in Viet Nam are found in the top 10 cm layer”; and
WHEREAS, Dioxin levels exceed Vietnamese and international standards and guidelines for TCDD; and
WHEREAS, Tilapia, the most common fish captured and raised in Vietnam, were found to have more than 200 times the acceptable level established by Health Canada; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion request Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grant those members of the United States Military of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command; The U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory - Hawaii, the Joint Task Force – Full Accounting, and the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, who have been activated and served in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia be presumed to have been exposed during such service to an herbicide agent; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That the VA grant these personnel the same compensation as their counterparts who served between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.

Resolution No. 162: In Vitro Fertilization
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, One of the Four Pillars of The American Legion is Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for our military, veterans and their families; and
WHEREAS, The morale of the veteran and his family is a key part of his or her rehabilitation; and
WHEREAS, Some veterans because of their injuries cannot have children without the assistance of reproductive technology; and
WHEREAS, The wars of the last decade have seen thousands of veterans leaving them unable to have children; and
WHEREAS, The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs from paying for In Vitro Fertilization, yet if they were still on active duty, the United States Government would pay for this treatment; and
WHEREAS, Money should not be the reason not to help these veterans become a family that should be a common right; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress, the Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs to properly fund an In Vitro Fertilization program.

Resolution No. 163: Legislation to Provide Reporting, Tracking, and Action Dealing with Sexual Assaults at Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Our men and women returning home from military service and all veterans deserve the highest level of health care, which includes both quality and safety; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does have a policy on sexual assault prevention; however, with the influx of an increasing women veterans population, the policy should be updated and refined; and

WHEREAS, There is a report issued by the Government Accountability Office, GAO-11-736T, dated June 13, 2011 calling for “Improvements Needed for Monitoring and Preventing Sexual Assaults and Other Safety Incidents,” which detailed serious security lapses in VA’s reporting system for such incidents delivered earlier in 2011; and

WHEREAS, There is a need for legislation to increase the safety of patients and staff and improve upon inconsistencies in tracking, reporting, and action; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourage Congress to pass legislation in order to ensure reporting, tracking, and actions taken upon incidents of sexual assaults at each Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility including:

• Tools to assess the risk of individual veterans
• Mandatory security training
• Physical security precautions (surveillance cameras, panic alarm systems)
• Criteria and guidance for employees communicating and reporting incidents to specified supervisory personnel, VA law enforcement officials and the VA Office of Inspector General
• An oversight system within the Veterans Health Administration
• Procedures for VA law enforcement officials investigating, tracking and closing reported incidents.

Resolution No. 164: Oppose Lowering of Cost-of-Living Adjustments
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion, since its inception, has promoted improvements in the earned benefits of the nation’s military retirees and veterans; and

WHEREAS, These Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits were earned through a veteran’s selfless service during wartime; and

WHEREAS, The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services; and

WHEREAS, The CPI for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U) is based on the expenditures of almost all residents of urban or metropolitan areas, including professionals, the self-employed, the poor, the unemployed, and retired people; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees, veterans receiving Social Security benefits and certain VA beneficiaries receive an annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) based on the CPI-U calculation; and
WHEREAS, The Chained Consumer Price Index (C-CPI-U) uses a formula that reflects the effect of substitution that consumers make in response to changes in relative prices; and
WHEREAS, The C-CPI-U would result in a lower COLA than one based on the current CPI-U; and
WHEREAS, There is current dialogue among lawmakers to consider switching future COLA calculations from the current CPI-U to the C-CPI-U; and
WHEREAS, The Congressional Budget Office estimates that switching to the C-CPI-U instead of the CPI-U for calculations of future COLAs would save the U.S. Treasury $208 billion (by reducing VA benefits and civilian and military retirement pay by approximately $24 billion and Social Security benefits by $112 billion) over 10 years; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion expresses strong opposition to using any Consumer Price Index that would reduce the annual cost-of-living adjustment for military retirees, veterans receiving Social Security benefits or Department of Veterans Affairs beneficiaries.

Resolution No. 165: Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Programs
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Public Health estimates in January 2014, 2.6 million servicemembers who deployed to support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND), 1,724,058 have left active duty and are eligible for VA health care, of which 998,004 have received VA health care.; and
WHEREAS, The “signature wounds” of Iraq and Afghanistan are Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and
WHEREAS, Mental disorders are the second largest frequency of diagnoses among returning OEF/OIF/OND servicemembers which are currently estimated at 50.7 percent; and
WHEREAS, In 2007, VA established a TBI, PTSD Clinical Reminder in VA’s electronic medical record for any new patient to identify veterans that need additional screening for a possible TBI or PTSD diagnosis; and
WHEREAS, VA has screened and diagnosed hundreds of thousands of veterans with TBI/PTSD and continues to have several challenges in the proper diagnosis and treatment of TBI and PTSD because of the overlap of symptoms; and
WHEREAS, According to VA, the overlapping symptoms between mild TBI and PTSD are headaches, dizziness, fatigue and noise/light intolerance, re-experiencing, avoidance and emotional numbing; and
WHEREAS, Currently, there are not any definitive medical treatments for TBI and providers/clinicians use therapy and medications to treat the symptoms; and
WHEREAS, Evidence-based treatments for PTSD include Cognitive Processing Therapy, Prolonged Exposure Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, as well as medication management; and
WHEREAS, VA’s Veteran Health Administration has several different research offices involved in studying TBI/PTSD including: VA Office of Research and Development; TBI Centers of Excellence; National Center for PTSD; Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers; War Related Illness and Injury Study Center; and Office of Public Health Environmental Epidemiology Service Office but lacks central oversight for management of all the different research studies and trials through the current decentralized research model; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DoD) and VA developed a DoD/VA Integrated Mental Health Strategy which recommended as one of the strategic objectives to “develop a system to deliver evidence-based psychotherapies” but in the plan it does not mention coordinating research jointly between both departments; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion developed a TBI/PTSD Ad Hoc Committee in 2010 to investigate the existing science and procedures and alternative methods for treating TBI/PTSD; and

WHEREAS, The committee has found several concerns including: the overlapping of symptomology between TBI/PTSD and Substance Abuse Disorder which makes it difficult to diagnose and treat the correct injury/illness; ineffective and overuse of medications; and reluctance of servicemembers and veterans to receive and continue mental health treatment; and

WHEREAS, VA conducted a study on Risperidone, a second generation antipsychotic, which is not approved by the Federal Drug Administration for use in treating PTSD; and

WHEREAS, Researchers of the study concluded that Risperidone did not improve PTSD symptoms but had several negative side effects which included weight gain, sleepiness and increased saliva in the mouth; and

WHEREAS, Researchers in the study concluded that in FY 2010, VA treated 86,852 veterans for PTSD last year, of which nearly 20 percent were prescribed this off-label and ineffective medication, and currently the only antidepressants and serotonin reuptake inhibitors such as sertraline and paroxetine are currently approved for treatment; and

WHEREAS, Veterans that have participated in past DoD/VA TBI/PTSD research studies have not always been properly informed that they are participants in the study and are not given a disclosure of the effects of any treatment they may be receiving through a study; and

WHEREAS, Additionally, the TBI/PTSD committee in their charge found several new innovative treatments for TBI/PTSD which include Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy and Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy that have not been prioritized for clinical studies to determine if they are evidence-based treatments; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to provide oversight and funding to the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for innovative Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) research currently used in the private sector, such as Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy and Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy and other non-pharmacological treatments; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to increase the budgets for DOD and VA to improve the research, screening, diagnosis and treatment of TBI/PTSD as well as provide oversight over DoD/VA to develop joint offices for collaboration between DoD/VA research; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That DoD/VA both establish a single office for their agency’s research and serve as a clearinghouse to track all DoD or VA research, and that all DoD/VA individual research programs and activities coordinate and provide monthly and as needed updates on research activities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That servicemembers and veterans who participate in DoD/VA TBI/PTSD research studies are properly informed and give their consent to be included in the study as well as be provided with a disclosure of any negative effects of treatment; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That DoD/VA accelerate research efforts to properly diagnose and develop evidence-based treatments for TBI/PTSD; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to exercise oversight over DoD/VA to ensure servicemembers and veterans are only prescribed evidence-
based treatments for TBI/PTSD and not prescribed off-label and non-Federal Drug Administration approved medications or treatments for TBI/PTSD.

Resolution No. 166: Department of Veterans Affairs Involvement in the Department of Homeland Security

Origin: Pennsylvania

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Homeland Security provides a single source of authority, at the highest level, for all homeland defense programs and policies; and
WHEREAS, The role of the Department of Homeland Security is to coordinate national strategy to strengthen protection against terrorist threats or attacks; and
WHEREAS, One of the critical missions of the Department of Homeland Security is emergency preparedness and response “to minimize the damage and recover from future terrorist attacks”; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical system serves as a primary back-up to the Department of Defense (DoD) in the event of military casualties; and
WHEREAS, VA and DoD have a Contingency Hospital System Plan as part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; and
WHEREAS, VA is prepared to augment the DoD’s network of hospital and health care facilities in the event of a crisis, with 155 medical centers and a significant medical staff, many of whom are veterans; and
WHEREAS, VA also acts as a federal support organization during major disasters, as one of four partners in the National Disaster Medical System; and
WHEREAS, VA provided medical and psychological support to those in need during the months following the September 11, 2001, attack; and
WHEREAS, VA also maintains radiological response teams and decontamination systems should radioactive materials ever be used; and
WHEREAS, VA manages the largest health-care program and is the largest medical education and health professional training program in the United States; and
WHEREAS, VA is a federal presence in virtually every local community in the country; and
WHEREAS, VA has the ability to move health-care professionals to the site of a disaster and provide medical care quickly and efficiently; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that the contingency plan for disasters developed by VA and DoD should be integrated as a part of the primary health care procedures of homeland security; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress and the Administration to include the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in all strategic planning of the Department of Homeland Security; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That Congress takes into account any additional requirements of VA as a result of involvement in homeland security obligations when developing VA’s annual budget.

Resolution No. 178: Assured Funding for VA Medical Care

Origin: Georgia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) annual budget consists of both mandatory and discretionary funding; and
WHEREAS, Mandatory funding refers to a process where the level of funding is governed by formulas or criteria set forth in authorizing legislation rather than by appropriations; and
WHEREAS, Under budget law, a mandatory program is one that requires provision of benefits to all who meet the eligibility requirements of the law; and

WHEREAS, Mandatory funding is provided for programs such as Social Security, Medicare and VA compensation and pension; and

WHEREAS, In contrast, discretionary funding is “all other” funding subject to the annual appropriations process; and

WHEREAS, Discretionary funding in VA’s current annual budget provides for programs such as medical care, major and minor construction, National Cemetery Administration, State Extended Care Facility Grants, and State Cemetery Grants; and

WHEREAS, There have been annual struggles to obtain sufficient funding to provide access to quality care for eligible veterans seeking care in VA facilities; and

WHEREAS, A method to provide dependable, stable and sustained funding for veterans health care is needed; and

WHEREAS, Assured (mandated) funding is one component of a combination of funding mechanisms to ensure adequate Veterans Health Administration funding; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Congress designate assured funding for VA medical care; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress continue to provide discretionary funding required to fully operate other programs within the Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA) budgetary jurisdiction; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress provide, if necessary, supplemental appropriations for budgetary shortfalls in VHA’s mandated and discretionary appropriations to meet the health-care needs of America’s veterans.

Resolution No. 179: Extend the Filing Period of an Appeal Notice to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

Origin: Georgia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Claimants have up to one year from notice of a Department of Veterans Affairs rating decision to file an appeal with any or all adjudicated issues to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA); and

WHEREAS, Notice of Appeal of a final denied claim by the Board of Veterans’ Appeals must be filed with the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) within 120 days of the denial by the BVA; and

WHEREAS, The CAVC lacks statutory authority to waive the 120 day period for filing Notice of Appeal; and

WHEREAS, Veterans or their surviving spouses can become discouraged, or are not effectively represented, or may require more time to perfect their appeal to the CAVC; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall support legislation to extend the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Notice of Appeal filing period to one year following Board of Veterans’ Appeals final denial of an appeal.
Resolution No. 180: Designate Hypertension as a Presumptive Condition for Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange

Origin: Georgia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Hypertension/high blood pressure is a highly recognized disorder/disease, which can result in many long term health issues and potentially have fatal end results; and

WHEREAS, Hypertension/high blood pressure is directly related to heart and kidney disease; and

WHEREAS, While a significant number of veterans suffer from hypertension, or high blood pressure and many were exposed to Agent Orange; and

WHEREAS, A 2008 study conducted by the Institute of Medicine suggest that many cases could be a result of exposure to Agent Orange during Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, This study added high blood pressure to the category of “limited or suggestive evidence of an association,” meaning there could be a link with Agent Orange exposure; and

WHEREAS, More recent studies from the Institute of Medicine, indicate strongly that Veterans who handled or were exposed to defoliants have a higher rate of high blood pressure; and

WHEREAS, The United States has used Agent Orange as a defoliant in Thailand (February 1, 1961 thru May 7, 1975), Vietnam (January 9, 1962 thru May 7, 1975) and again in Korea from April 1, 1968 thru August 31, 1971; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek the Department of Veterans Affairs for approval of adding hypertension/high blood pressure to the list of presumptive conditions for any veteran who was exposed to Agent Orange in any area where Agent Orange was tested, sprayed or stored; and,

be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to amend Title 38, of the United States Code, section 1116 to provide entitlement to those presumptions for those veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in any area where Agent Orange was tested, sprayed or stored.

Resolution No. 181: National Cemetery Administration

Origin: Georgia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) was established by Congress and approved by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to provide for the proper burial and registration of graves of Civil War dead; and

WHEREAS, NCA is currently comprised of 134 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, as well as, 33 soldiers’ lots and monuments; and

WHEREAS, More than 3 million Americans including veterans of every war and conflict are buried in VA’s national cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, More than 24 million veterans and Reservists and National Guard members have earned the honor of burial in a national cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Annual interments in national cemeteries have annually increased and are projected to increase for the next several years due to an aging veteran population; and

WHEREAS, Appropriate land acquisition is a key component to providing continued accessibility to burial options; and

WHEREAS, Operations, maintenance, renovation, and construction funding must continually be adjusted to reflect the true requirements of the National Cemetery Administration; and
WHEREAS, NCA administers a program of grants to states, U.S. territories, and federally recognized tribal governments to assist them in establishing or improving state-operated veterans cemeteries in locations where there are no nearby national cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, Congress must provide sufficient major construction appropriations to permit NCA to accomplish its stated goal of ensuring that burial in a national or state cemetery is a realistic option by locating cemeteries within 75 miles of ninety percent of all veterans; and

WHEREAS, In addition to providing a grave site, NCA provides a headstone or marker, a Presidential Memorial certificate, a U.S. Flag, Medallion, and perpetual care for the grave; and

WHEREAS, The 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act eliminated the then-headstone allowance of $85, which was paid to all eligible veterans in lieu of a government-provided headstone or marker and now directly provides a standard government headstone or grave marker to eligible veterans anywhere in the world; and

WHEREAS, VA pays a burial allowance of $2,000 for veterans who die of service-related causes and for veterans who were receiving VA compensation or pension, VA pays $722 for burial and funeral expenses and $722 for a plot; and

WHEREAS, The plot allowance would still be payable to state veterans cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, If a veteran passes away in a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital, nursing home, or domiciliary, or in an institution at which the individual was receiving hospital or nursing care at the expense of the United States at the time of death, VA will pay for the cost of transporting the remains to the place of burial; however, a veteran who passes away in a State Veterans Home is not allowed transportation cost for the remains to the place of burial by VA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the establishment of additional national and state veterans cemeteries and columbaria wherever a need for them is apparent and petition Congress to provide required operations and construction funding to ensure Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) burial in a national or state veterans cemetery is a realistic option for veterans and their eligible dependents; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to return the burial allowances and burial plot allowance to all veterans who served during a time of war or conflict; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the burial allowance for veterans now eligible under 38 United States Code (USC) § 2302 and 2303 be increased from $722 to at least $1,500; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the burial allowance for veterans who died as a result of a service-connected condition as set forth in 38 USC § 2307 be increased from $2,000 to at least $4,000; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That VA be required to annually adjust burial allowances and burial plot allowance for inflation by tying the increased allowances to the Consumer Price Index; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support action to provide, when an eligible veteran dies in a state veterans hospital or nursing home, the Secretary of
Veterans Affairs shall pay for the cost of transporting the remains to the place of burial determined by the family.

Resolution No. 182: Non-Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Care
Origin: Georgia
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C), Section 1703a states when Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities are not “capable of furnishing economical hospital care or medical services because of geographical inaccessibility or are not capable of furnishing the care or services required, the Secretary may contract with non-Department facilities in order to furnish medical care”; and

WHEREAS, VA is permitted under Title 38 (U.S.C.) § 1728 and 1725 to make payment and reimbursement to a claimant for emergency treatment provided to service-connected and nonservice-connected veterans with a timely filing limit for unauthorized inpatient or outpatient medical care claims (two years from the date of care for service-connected veterans, and 90 days for nonservice-connected veterans); and

WHEREAS, Several veterans have reported to The American Legion that delayed payments for emergency care by the VA to the non-VA provider have resulted in numerous credit issues for veterans; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has long urged VA to adopt a more definitive policy on emergency care that is consistently applied at every VA Medical Center; and

WHEREAS, VA’s policy cannot continue to result in unfair billing for veterans who require emergency care outside VA; and

WHEREAS, Veterans need a solid recourse plan on what to do in the event that VA delays payments of claims for emergency medical care furnished by non-VA medical providers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation urging the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to promptly pay non-VA providers for emergency care furnished; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA conduct outreach to veterans regarding the effect of delayed payments of claims for emergency medical care furnished by non-VA medical providers.

Resolution No. 183: Presumptive Conditions for Former Prisoners of War
Origin: Georgia
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, In its interest for the welfare of all those who have served in the nation's Armed Forces, one of the major concerns of The American Legion has been the welfare of those who have been prisoners of war (POWs); and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has supported various legislative measures intended to alleviate the disabilities that afflict former POWs as a result of experience during internment; and

WHEREAS, In the past, The American Legion supported enactment of Public Law 97-37, the Former Prisoners of War Benefits Act of 1981, approved August 14, 1981, and the presumptions included in Public Law 100-322; and

WHEREAS, Continued scientific observation of their condition during the years subsequent to their internment indicates additional health problems probably associated with the conditions of their internment; and

WHEREAS, The United States has a fundamental obligation to do everything possible to alleviate any and all health problems of former POWs and see to their physical, social, and economic well-being; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes there is a need to further modify the current provisions of title 38, United States Code, that provide for former POWs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall support legislation to amend section 1112 of title 38, United States Code, so as to provide presumptive service connection for the following conditions in the absence of demonstrable inter-current disease or injury:

1. Hepatitis or other infectious diseases of the liver;
2. Arthritis, including osteoporosis;
3. Chronic pulmonary disease (where there is a history of forced labor in mines during internment);
4. Chronic liver disease;
5. Adult-onset diabetes; and,

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek legislation to be enacted to rescind the requirement in section 1112(b) of title 38, United States Code, that a POW must be held in captivity for at least 30 days to receive benefits and compensation for any presumptive disabilities, specified in that section, that were incurred in captivity; and,

RESOLVED, That The American Legion shall support any and all efforts on the part of the United States government to alleviate and ameliorate social, economic, and physical disabilities experienced by former POWs where such disabilities can reasonably be attributed to the effects of internment by the enemies of the United States.

Resolution No. 185: State Veteran Home Per Diem Reimbursement

Origin: Georgia

WHEREAS, State Veterans Homes were founded in the late 1800s for indigent and disabled Civil War veterans and continue to serve generations of veterans today; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code Subchapter V – Payment to State Homes authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to pay per diems for care in State Veterans Homes to those veterans with a 70 percent or greater service-connection rating or any veteran in need of such care for a service-connected disability; and

WHEREAS, A Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report 06-264 in March, 2006, Data Gaps Impede Strategic Planning for and Oversight of State Veterans’ Nursing Homes, identified that certain aspects of VA’s per diem reimbursement policy had not been applied consistently and VA headquarters officials have not been consistent in explaining to VA Medical Centers whether they could approve reimbursement to state veterans’ nursing homes for care provided to veterans; and

WHEREAS, A Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report 09-145 in January, 2009, Long-Term Care Strategic Planning and Budgeting Need Improvement, reported that, “many veterans who need long-term care do not receive it from VA, but instead receive care from other providers that is financed by programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, private health or long-term care insurance, or self-financing by the patients”; and
WHEREAS, GAO Report 09-145 concluded as a result, in VA’s long-term care strategic planning, determining future workload is a multi-step process requiring estimating the number of veterans who will need long-term care, the number of those veterans seeking care through the VA and the number of veterans VA will serve, which is expected to increase by 167 percent between FY 2007 and 2013 and that VA provided unrealistic cost assumptions and workloads in its FY 2009 budget submission; and

WHEREAS, VA pays State Veterans Homes a per diem that covers approximately one-third of the cost of providing these services to eligible veterans, which is less than the actual daily cost of care provided by Medicare/Medicaid rate; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has supported enactment of legislation to require VA per diem payments be at a rate of 50 percent of the national average cost of providing care in State Veterans Homes, to increase the VA per diem rate closer to the Medicare/Medicaid rate; and

WHEREAS, In September 2009, The National Association of State Veterans Homes and State Directors of Veterans Affairs recommended that Congress pass a clarifying amendment to P.L. 109-461 to postpone the mandatory implementation of the VA per diem program due to the lower cost of VA’s per diem amount, compared to the Medicare/Medicaid rate which would shift all the cost burden on the State Veteran Home operating budget; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion remains concerned that Congress has not provided clarification of Public Law 109-461 and VA has not factually reported its planning workload projections to assist State Veterans Homes budgets; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code to provide clarification to the State Veterans Home, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) per diem reimbursements; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to increase VA per diem payments to a rate of 50 percent of the national average cost of providing care in a State Veterans Home to more closely align to the Medicaid/Medicare rate; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA accurately report its planning workload projections and budget submissions in future fiscal years to account for the 167 percent increase in long-term care workload identified by the Government Accountability Office.

Resolution No. 186: Department of Veterans Affairs Dental Care
Origin: Georgia
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, This great organization was based upon comradeship born of wartime service and dedicated to fair and equitable treatment of all veterans and their dependents; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes that oral health is integral to the general health and well-being of a patient and is part of comprehensive health care; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system is mandated under Section 1712, Title 38, United States Code, to provide outpatient dental services to veterans rated 100% service-connected, to veterans held Prisoner-of-War, or to those who have sustained dental trauma in performance of military service; and

WHEREAS, Section 1710, Title 38, United States Code, authorizes VA to provide hospital care and medical services to any veteran for a service-connected disability or a veteran who has a service-connected disability rated at 50% or greater; and

WHEREAS, A dental condition is a medical condition which can impact on all other medical conditions; and
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WHEREAS, VA currently provides dental services throughout the VA health-care system; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, Section 1712, to provide outpatient dental care to all enrolled veterans.

Resolution No. 187: Department of Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation
Origin: Georgia
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The current disability compensation program has proven to be a fair and equitable manner in which to indemnify veterans suffering disabilities that are incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the military, naval, or air service; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is totally supportive of every benefit that is currently provided to veterans for their past contributions to their country and its welfare; and
WHEREAS, Disability compensation is a monthly payment made by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) based on a schedule of ratings of reduction in earning capacity from specific injuries as set forth in title 38, Code of Federal Regulations; and
WHEREAS, It is the opinion of The American Legion that there is no way to adequately compensate a veteran for loss of ability to be a working, productive member of society, and that the current monthly rates do not adequately compensate these disabled veterans for the loss due to reduced earning capacity; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes Congress should periodically review the amount of disability compensation veterans are receiving and provide a cost-of-living adjustment to assure they have sufficient economic support; and
WHEREAS, Periodically, proposals are made to tax VA disability compensation benefits; and
WHEREAS, Taxation of these benefits would amount to nothing more than a permanent, enduring reduction in benefits and would demean the sacrifice and service of our nation's service-connected disabled veteran population; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion vigorously oppose any proposal that would subject VA disability compensation benefits to taxation; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose any administrative or legislative proposal to dilute or eliminate any provision of the disability compensation program; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, section 1114, to provide a periodic cost-of-living adjustment increase and to increase the monthly rates of disability compensation; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose any legislative effort to automatically index such cost-of-living adjustments to the cost-of-living adjustment authorized for Social Security recipients, non-service connected disability recipients and death pension beneficiaries.

Resolution No. 188: Department of Veterans Affairs' Role in National Emergency Preparedness
Origin: Georgia
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Under title 38, United States Code, 8111A, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been established as the principal medical care back-up for military health
care “during and immediately following a period of war, or a period of national emergency declared by the President or the Congress that involves the use of the Armed Forces in armed conflict”; and

WHEREAS, Under the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) and the Federal Response Plan (FRP) VA’s specialized duties entail conducting and evaluating disaster and terrorist attack simulation exercises; managing the nation’s stockpile of pharmaceuticals for biological and chemical toxins; maintaining a rapid response team for radiological releases; and training public and private NDMS medical center personnel around the country in properly responding to biological, chemical, or radiological disasters; and

WHEREAS, The VA Strategic Plan for 2014-2020 lists as an objective, “Ensure Preparedness to Provide Services and Protect People and Assets Continuously and in Time of Crisis”; and

WHEREAS, If VA is to play a key supporting role as part of the FRP and the NDMS, it must have adequate resources to execute its role; and

WHEREAS, The Strategic Capital Investment Planning process was designed to ensure that VA’s capital infrastructure meets the needs of veterans for health care services in 2011 and beyond; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) implementation of the Strategic Capital Investment Planning decision must take into consideration and sustain VA’s ability to perform its fourth mission as a back up to the Department of Defense; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to continue to take an active role in the development and implementation of plans to enhance Federal homeland security initiatives; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion strongly urges Congress to provide VA with the funding necessary to further enhance its capacity to act as a back-up to the Department of Defense in times of war and to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in responding to national emergencies.

Resolution No. 193: Department of Veterans Affairs Foreign Medical Program
Origin: Washington
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Access to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care for veterans is enshrined in federal law, to include access to, and reimbursement for emergency medical care obtained at non-VA facilities in the United States or overseas for service connected disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, Such disabled veterans may travel outside the United States for business, family or recreational reasons; and

WHEREAS, Veterans with service-connected disabilities are entitled to receive emergency medical care overseas through the Foreign Medical Program (FMP) under the Chief Business Office of Purchased Care for services "that are medically necessary to treat a VA-rated, service-connected disability or for a condition that is associated with and held to be aggravating a service-connected disability;" and

WHEREAS, The FMP claim process may require that the veteran first pays unaffordable out-of-pocket costs to an overseas health care provider and then later file for reimbursement; a condition that creates a financial hardship on the veteran; and

WHEREAS, Veterans travelling overseas, in the vicinity of U.S. military installations, at times may experience medical emergencies related to their service-connected disability, but if they are not enrolled in Tricare, cannot receive medical care on U.S. military installations; and

WHEREAS, Tricare does, however, sometimes contract with overseas emergency medical facilities local to U.S. military installations to accept payment from Tricare; and
WHEREAS, The VA already contracts with Tricare providers though the Chief Business Office of Purchased Care for Patient-Centered Community Care through Tri-West to serve veteran health-care needs in numerous Veterans Integrated Service Networks; and

WHEREAS, The VA, under the Chief Business Office of Purchased Care already contracts with Tricare with their Patient-Centered Community Care program; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to adopt further contracting with Tricare to expand access under the Foreign Medical Program for veterans to seek emergency medical care from overseas Tricare providers who will handle the payments at no out-of-pocket costs to the veteran.

Resolution No. 194: Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran Integrated Service Networks
Origin: Washington
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is organized into a national VA Central Office Headquarters and 21 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), or regions, which oversee several VA Medical Center facilities and Community Based Outpatient Clinics; and

WHEREAS, VISNs were established by Dr. Kenneth Kizer, Former Under Secretary for Health for VHA to decentralize VA from VA Central Office to regions in order to promote best practices, innovation and be responsible for all financial and operational activities for the VA Medical Center facilities under their jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, Originally, VISN staffing models called for seven to ten full time employee equivalents (FTEE) within each of the 22 VISNS nationwide, for a total of 220 FTE employees nationwide; and

WHEREAS, Over the years, as new VHA programs and initiatives have been designed and implemented by VA Central Office, the VISNs have considerably increased staff to administer, track and manage these programs which are over 1,300 employees today; and

WHEREAS, The VA Office of the Inspector General issued three reports on VISNs recommending (a) the Under Secretary for Health implement a system of financial management and fiscal controls for the VISN offices; (b) strengthen the VISN offices’ performance management system and implement management controls over organizational structures and staffing; (c) VA and VHA acquisition management improve oversight of VISN contracts and develop tools to effectively manage VISN contracting activities, which clearly indicates the need for improvements with VISN programs and initiatives; and

WHEREAS, Since the VISN model was developed, there has not been any Government Accountability Office, VA Office of the Inspector General or reports from VHA leadership on the overall effectiveness of the current VISN structure and geographic boundaries in improving access to and quality health care for veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to direct the Government Accountability Office and Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General conduct a comprehensive study to include purpose, goals, objectives and budget and evaluation of the effectiveness of the 21 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs); and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Veterans Health Administration leadership conduct an internal review and develop an action plan to address VISN management, staffing
and its current geographic boundaries/catchment areas concerns, in order to better provide timely access and quality health care for veterans.

Resolution No. 228: Timely Processing of Overpayments for Reserve Components and/or Active Duty Pay

Origin: Arizona

WHEREAS, U.S. Code Title 10 Armed Forces, Subtitle E, Chapter 1209 Active Duty, Section 12316 states in part: (a) Except as provided by subsection (b), a Reserve of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard who because of his earlier military service is entitled to a pension, retired or retainer pay, or disability compensation, and who performs duty for which he is entitled to compensation, may elect to receive for that duty either-

(1) the payments to which he is entitled because of his earlier military service; or
(2) if he specifically waives those payments, the pay and allowances authorized by law for the duty that he is performing; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Code Title 38 Veterans Benefits, Part IV General Administrative Provisions, Chapter 53 Special Provisions Relating to Benefits, Section 5304 states in part: (c) Pension, compensation, or retirement pay on account of any person's own service shall not be paid to such person for any period for which such person receives active service pay; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the authority under U.S. Code Title 38, Chapter 53 to withhold any such overpayment incurred from duplicate payment of disability compensation and active service pay from future compensation payments to the veteran; and

WHEREAS, With other debts incurred by veterans for overpayments or educational debts the veteran is afforded the opportunity to make payment arrangements with the collection arm of the VA, namely Debt Management, and pay this debt back in monthly installments; and

WHEREAS, The VA is grossly delinquent in processing the overpayments for military drill pay each year, sometimes resulting in processing of two or three years at the same time, several years in arrears; and

WHEREAS, The VA does not afford the veteran the opportunity to make payment arrangements, but instead withholds the entire monthly compensation, which can result in the veteran not receiving any compensation for two, four, or six months; and

WHEREAS, The veteran has come to rely on the monthly disability or pension payments and having the entire amount withheld, sometimes years after the veteran has ceased to be in a drilling status with a Reserve Component, results in serious financial difficulty for the veteran; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports a strong recommendation to the Department of Veterans Affairs that they:

a. Place greater emphasis on processing of these overpayments for the performance of Reserved Component and/or Active Duty pay so as not to have multiple years processed at the same time; and

b. Allow the debt to be placed with Debt Management for collection to allow the veteran to pay the debt in installments so as not to cause a financial hardship.
Resolution No. 230: Policy for those Serving November 4, 1979 Through January 20, 1981 to be Considered Wartime Veterans

Origin: New York

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, During the early part of 1979 the ideology of the Iranian Islamic revolutionary government had led to a steady deterioration in Iran-U.S. relations which culminated in an act of aggression on the United States described by then President Jimmy Carter as “victims of terrorism and anarchy”; and

WHEREAS, On Nov. 4, 1979 in Tehran Iran the United States embassy was attacked and seized by Iranian students and terrorist factions and because the American consulate is a sovereign U.S. territory and an attack on the embassy is exactly the same as an attack on our mainland soil which constitutes an act of war; and

WHEREAS, Of the approximately 90 people inside the embassy, including the United States Marine Corps Embassy Guard, 52 remained in captivity until the end of the crisis; and

WHEREAS, At the same time several diplomatic initiatives began to free the hostages, all of which proved fruitless; and

WHEREAS, This prompted the use of military force on April 24-25, 1980 during which the United States attempted a military rescue mission that failed after three of eight helicopters were damaged in a sandstorm and subsequent crash the operation was aborted and during the failed attempt eight U.S. servicemen were killed; and

WHEREAS, The hostages taken at the U.S. Embassy remained in captivity for 444 days, and

WHEREAS, As a direct result of this crisis the armed forces of the United States were placed in a state of combat readiness which is similar in nature to the combat state during other recent periods of conflict; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion, urges the United States Congress and President to include the men and women of the United States armed services who served on active duty during the dates November 4, 1979 through January 20, 1981 inclusive be considered war time veterans and afford them all rights and privileges associated with being war time veterans.

Resolution No. 236: Department of Veterans Affairs to Provide Interim Benefits for Pending Claims Over 90 Days

Origin: New York

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion, while supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in its efforts to provide support to military veterans of the United States of America, recognizes the growing backlog of claims for disability and compensation submitted by military veterans; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has continued to press the VA to improve both the efficiency and accuracy with which veterans’ claims are processed; and

WHEREAS, Testimony by The American Legion before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs of the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, United States House of Representatives informed Congress that the VA continues to be inefficient and inaccurate in processing veterans’ claims for disability and compensation; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who have filed compensation and pension claims with the Veterans Benefits Administration and disagree with the decisions of the Regional Offices are entitled to appeal these decisions to the Board of Veterans Appeals; and

WHEREAS, The Regional Offices take anywhere from 76.6 to 361.7 days to produce a rating decision; and
WHEREAS, Although the Board of Veterans’ Appeals has authority to complete the development of cases, it remands approximately 25% of cases appealed back to the Regional Offices for additional development, thereby delaying consideration of the veteran’s claims; and

WHEREAS, Another government agency, the Internal Revenue Service (I.R.S), must pay interest on delayed refunds of more than 45 days from the due date of the return; and

WHEREAS, The rate of interest the I.R.S. uses changes every three months to reflect the prime interest rate then in effect; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31 September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall support any legislation to pay on a non-refundable basis in an amount to be determined by Congress for each day, from the date of original submission, for any claim decided after the 125 day limit; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the action taken by Congress can include, but is not limited to, a nominal grant or interest that will be at the same rate as used by the Internal Revenue Service when their refunds are delayed more than 45 days; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to establish interim benefits for veterans awaiting action on claims for service connected disabilities if no action is taken by the Department of Veterans Affairs within the first 125 days of the claim’s submission.

Resolution No. 237: Authorization to Apply for a Headstone, Marker, or Medallion
Origin: New York
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, These accredited representatives routinely assist the next-of-kin complete and submit VA Form 40-1330 and appropriate documentation to apply for a headstone, marker or medallion; and

WHEREAS, These accredited representatives could complete a VA Form 40-1330 to order a headstone, marker or medallion for a veteran’s unmarked grave site when no next-of-kin is available if authorized under CFR 38.632; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Code of Federal Regulations 38-632 to specify that Department of Veterans Affairs recognized veteran service organization accredited representatives be authorized to apply for a headstone, marker or medallion, in the absence of any next-of-kin.

Resolution No. 238: Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act
Origin: New York
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Members of the United States Armed Forces are often called upon to perform their duties in stressful and life-threatening situations which can result in the development of mental issues; and

WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) an estimated 22 veterans die each day by suicide; and

WHEREAS, The Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act would improve access to care for veterans by extending the period during which veterans who experienced combat are eligible for care from 5 years to 15 years; and

WHEREAS, The act would increase the service capacity of the VA by offering student loan repayment to mental health care professional who agree to long-term service commitments; and

WHEREAS, Under the Act, the VA and the Department of Defense would be required to review their mental health care programs annually to ensure their effectiveness, offer
special training on identifying those veterans who are at risk of suicide to their mental health providers and to improve the process regarding medical records and prescriptions to ensure seamless care to transitioning servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, Enhancing mental health-care services provided by the federal government would better the lives for countless returning servicemembers and veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the U.S. Congress to pass and the President to sign into law the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act or similar acts that will expand and improve the care provided to veterans and servicemembers who have mental health issues or are at risk for suicide.

Resolution No. 239: Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for Surviving Spouses

Origin: New York

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, A surviving spouse who remarries on or after December 16, 2003, and on or after attaining age 57, is entitled to continue to receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC); and

WHEREAS, By placing an age on eligibility for DIC, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is forcing surviving spouses to not move forward with life; and

WHEREAS, When other survivor benefit programs were liberalized, they usually covered the widows of veterans who died before the enactment of the law, (e.g. deaths from cancers from Agent Orange); and

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code, section 1318 authorizes DIC to be paid to the widows and widowers of service-connected disabled veterans who die as a result of their service-related condition or who at the time of death were, or should have been, rated 100% service-connected disabled for at least ten years; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans do not reach the 100% level for a service-connected disability until they are much older and their condition has worsened; and

WHEREAS, The spouse has usually been the primary caregiver and companion for these veterans throughout the veteran’s lifetime and VA’s compensation is their primary means of support; and

WHEREAS, On the surface the 10-year rule discriminates against a large group of veterans, and their survivors, simply because of when they file a claim for service-connected disability rather than recognizing the severity of the condition(s) and the impact of death (not related to the condition) on the family; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion work with Congress to enact legislation by December 2017 to eliminate the age criteria for a surviving spouse to remarry for eligibility to receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC); and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion work with Congress to enact legislation by December 2015 to reduce the number of years that a veteran must have a 100% disability rating from ten years to one year for eligibility of DIC payments.
Resolution No. 243: Compensation for Veterans Requiring Hearing Aids for Service Connected Hearing Loss

Origin: Illinois

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, After veterans are released from service they are able to apply for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation for their injuries and illnesses related to their active duty service; and

WHEREAS, The VA uses a standard schedule of ratings to determine the percent of disability compensation to assign; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans have suffered hearing loss from service due to loud noise exposure; and

WHEREAS, Many of these veterans are granted a 0% service-connected rating and this authorizes the VA hospital to furnish these veterans hearing aids as needed; and

WHEREAS, These hearing aids must be kept clean, properly stored when not in use, adjusted periodically and have batteries replaced when needed; and

WHEREAS, Although minor, these chores and maintenance do impact on a veteran’s quality of life and loss of income on a daily basis and therefore should warrant a minimum compensable rating; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to grant a minimum 10% rating for all veterans, who, due to their service-connected hearing loss, are furnished hearing aids.

Resolution No. 244: Exempt Purple Heart and Medal of Honor Recipients from VA Prescription Co-Payment

Origin: Illinois

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Under the priority category system at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, those who were awarded the Purple Heart have been singled out as a special group of veterans deserving special consideration for their service and sacrifice to their country; and

WHEREAS, This special group of Purple Heart recipients has been placed in Priority Group Three; and

WHEREAS, Under the Caregiver Bill, veterans that were awarded the Medal of Honor were placed into Priority Group Three; and

WHEREAS, Priority Group Three veterans do not have to make any copayments for any of their inpatient or outpatient care; and

WHEREAS, These same veterans, if they are rated under 50% service-connected disabled or receive prescriptions for a non-service connected condition are charged an $8 copayment for each 30 day supply of medication; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to exempt all those who were awarded the Purple Heart and/or the Medal of Honor and are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs health-care system, from any copayment for prescription drugs.
Resolution No. 245: Extend Eligibility for National Cemetery Administration Medallion
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, Our country has a proud history of honoring deceased veterans by providing a free government headstone or marker which can be placed either in a Department of Veterans Affairs national cemetery or a private cemetery; and
WHEREAS, Some veterans' families prefer to purchase their own headstone or marker for interment in a private cemetery; and
WHEREAS, Many of these headstones have no engraving upon them to reflect that the deceased was a veteran; and
WHEREAS, To correct this, the Department of Veterans Affairs now furnishes a medallion made of bronze that can be affixed to an existing privately purchased headstone or marker for veterans interred in a private cemetery; and
WHEREAS, Its purpose is to signify the deceased’s status as a veteran and is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches, and 1½ inches and each medallion is inscribed with the word VETERAN across the top and the branch of service at the bottom; and
WHEREAS, Under PL 110-157 this medallion is currently issued to all deceased other than dishonorably discharged veterans that died on or after November 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker; and
WHEREAS, If a veteran died before November 1, 1990 they would not qualify for this medallion; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to remove the date of November 1, 1990 from the current law (PL 110-157) and change it to grant eligibility for this medallion to all veterans other than dishonorably discharged, regardless of their date of death.

Resolution No. 246: Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, Annually the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updates a list which includes vessels that operated primarily or exclusively on Vietnam’s waterways; and
WHEREAS, This list includes ships that temporarily operated in these waterways or were moored at the shoreline and ships that operated in close coastal waters of Vietnam for extended periods with evidence that the crewmembers went ashore; and
WHEREAS, It is estimated that more than 500,000 servicemembers served aboard ships off the coast from 1964-1975; and
WHEREAS, Many of these personnel now have health problems commonly associated with herbicide exposure and have endured lengthy legal struggles to prove these problems are service-related; and
WHEREAS, In 2011, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science released its results of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Exposure Report, which found no consistent evidence to suggest “Blue Water Navy” veterans were at higher or lower risk and were unable to state with certainty that “Blue Water Navy” veterans were or were not exposed to dioxins from Agent Orange; and
WHEREAS, Current international law and treaties usually put the International Water boundary 12 nautical miles (22km) from a country’s coastline; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly supports legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to presume exposure to Agent Orange for any military personnel who served during the Vietnam War on any vessel that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam.

Resolution No. 247: Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Identity theft is rampant in our country and not only major retailers like Target but also government agencies like the Office of Personnel Management have been hacked and millions of names, addresses, dates of birth and Social Security numbers have been stolen; and

WHEREAS, This has resulted in millions of dollars in losses, ruined credit ratings, fraud and countless hardships over the nation as people try and repair the damage done by these hackers; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has certain safety guards in place when receiving telephone calls at its National Call Center (1-800-827-1000) and Veterans Administration employees who man those phones will ask a series of “challenge questions” e.g. dates of service, date of birth, previous address, etc.; and

WHEREAS, If these questions are not answered correctly the caller will be refused service over the phone and requested to write into VA for the answer to their questions; and

WHEREAS, With all these security breaches and hacks occurring, a professional hacker can get the answers to these “challenge questions” quite easily and pass the National Call Center security already in place; and

WHEREAS, Once through that security can find out very sensitive information like type of disabilities being claimed (including H.I.V. and nervous disorders), number of dependents, marriage status, apportionment information and would even be able to change addresses for mail and change direct deposit information for payments; and

WHEREAS, VA already has in place a procedure where a veteran can complete VA form 21-0845, Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party; and

WHEREAS, On this form the veteran selects an individual authorized to contact VA by telephone or in person and receive information (either all or limited) on his or her claim; and

WHEREAS, The veteran also selects a security question the caller must answer and this question would be of such a personal nature that almost all hackers would be unable to guess it; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to modify its current procedures regarding form 21-0845 and allow, on a voluntary basis, veterans and other claimants who are concerned about security to use this form for their own use and instead of listing in box #2 and 3 someone else, they can state “self” in these entries; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That if VA prefers or finds it more cost effective to develop a separate form for this situation they create one.
Resolution No. 249: Amend the Eligibility Requirements and Extend the Eligibility Time Period for Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance  
**Origin:** Illinois  
**Submitted by:** Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 113 (MD))

WHEREAS, The Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (SDVI) program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was founded by Congress in 1951 to provide life insurance coverage for veterans suffering only from disabilities rated by VA as being connected to their military service to the nation; and

WHEREAS, Service-connected disabled veterans are required by statute to not only be in good health except for their service-connected disability, but must apply for SDVI coverage within two years from the date of their last VA rating for a new, original disability, with increases in prior VA disability ratings not being includible for this purpose; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans in good health except for their service-connected disabilities, and who are granted rating increases because of worsening severity in such disabilities, continue to be denied SDVI coverage at a time when it has become most needful to them, due to the requirement that SDVI eligibility periods begin only with a VA rating for a new disability and last for only two years; and

WHEREAS, Other service-disabled veterans also continue to be denied insurance, due to the strict two-year time limit (from the date of their last original rating) to make application; and

WHEREAS, It continues to be the experience of veterans service organizations such as The American Legion that many service-disabled veterans remain unaware of the SDVI program despite automated VA notifications, and that the insurance benefit remains inadequate and in need of enhancement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to amend Section 1922(a) of title 38, United States Code, to permit that increases in VA service-connected ratings also provide a service-connected veteran with an eligibility period to apply for VA Service-Disabled Life Insurance in the same manner that ratings for new, original disabilities presently do, and that the time period of such eligibility be increased from the current two years to a period of at least five years from the date of rating determination and notification, and that such amendment also apply to any new similar issue of VA Service-Disabled Insurance that may be enacted into law.

Resolution No. 250: Increase Maximum Coverage Under the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance  
**Origin:** Illinois  
**Submitted by:** Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (also known as S-DVI or RH insurance) was established in 1951 to meet the insurance needs of certain veterans with service-related disabilities; and

WHEREAS, The maximum coverage was set at $10,000 back in 1951; and

WHEREAS, What cost $10,000 back in 1951 would cost over $80,000 in 2016 due to inflation; and

WHEREAS, This puts a greater burden on the surviving family members to meet the burial and final expenses of a deceased service-connected disabled veteran; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to increase to $75,000 the maximum coverage a service-connected disabled veteran can purchase under the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance program.

Resolution No. 251: Grant a 10% Rating for Veterans Who Must Take Daily Medications for Hypertension

Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, After veterans are released from service they are able to apply for VA compensation for their injuries and illnesses related to their active duty service; and
WHEREAS, The purpose of this program is to compensate a veteran for the average effect of their disability on their employment and quality of life; and
WHEREAS, Most rated disabilities start at 10% disabling and may go up to 100% depending on the severity of the condition; and
WHEREAS, In the case of hypertension a veteran who takes their medication regularly, watches their diet, weight and exercises on a regular basis may be able to keep their hypertension under good control; and
WHEREAS, Due to their proactive measures their diastolic pressure can be kept below 100 and/or systolic pressure predominantly under 160; and
WHEREAS, Under the current rating schedule, diagnostic code 7101 this would only allow a 0% rating; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall encourage and support legislation to change the rating schedule under diagnostic code 7101 to grant a 10% rating for any veteran who must take daily medication to keep their hypertension under control.

Resolution No. 252: Support Legislation to Pay Interest on Claims Granted by the Board of Veterans' Appeals

Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

(As amended)

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, Veterans who have filed compensation and pension claims with the Veterans Administration and disagree with the decisions of the Regional Offices of the Veterans Administration are entitled to appeal these decisions to the Board of Veterans' Appeals; and
WHEREAS, The average time from the filing of a notice of disagreement on a non-remanded case until the Department of Veterans Affairs sends the veterans’ file to the Board of Veterans' Appeals is averaging over 350 days; and
WHEREAS, Although the Board of Veterans' Appeals has authority to complete the development of cases, it remands approximately 50% of cases appealed to it back to the Regional Offices for additional development, thereby further delaying consideration of the veteran’s claim; and
WHEREAS, Another government agency, the Internal Revenue Service (I.R.S.), must pay interest on delayed refunds of more than 45 days from the due date of the return; and
WHEREAS, The rate of interest the I.R.S. uses changes every three months to reflect the prime interest rate then in effect; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall support any legislation to pay interest on claims that are favorably granted by the Board of Veterans' Appeals back to the original date of that claim and that this interest will be at the same rate as that used by the Internal Revenue Service when their refunds are delayed.

Resolution No. 253: Eliminate the Benefit Payment Loophole for Certain Incarcerated Veterans
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who are receiving Department of Veterans Affairs pension benefits have their benefits terminated on the 61st day of their imprisonment after conviction of a felony; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who are receiving compensation benefits have their benefits reduced on the 61st day of their imprisonment after conviction of a felony, to the 10% rate, or if at the 10% rate already then reduced to one-half of that rate; and

WHEREAS, A loophole exists in current laws to allow a veteran in receipt of pension or compensation benefits to continue to receive their checks while incarcerated if they committed a crime but found not guilty by reason of insanity or if they have served their sentence but civilly committed as a sexually violent person/predator; and

WHEREAS, These veterans may spend years in prison or at a treatment facility at taxpayer’s expense, receive medical care, meals, clothing etc. and at the same time continue to receive VA benefits; and

WHEREAS, This group of incarcerated or civilly committed veterans are therefore unduly enriched; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall support legislation to change the law and close this loophole and let the Department of Veterans Affairs terminate pension benefits, or reduce to 10% for those receiving service-connected compensation if the veteran is convicted of a crime but found not guilty by reason of insanity or civilly committed as a sexually violent person/predator and incarcerated.

Resolution No. 255: Reducing Eligibility for Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) Payments for 100% Disabled Veterans from 10 Years to 5 Years
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation is paid to the widows and widowers of service-connected disabled veterans who die as a result of their service-related condition or who at the time of death were rated 100% service-connected disabled for at least ten years, or in the case of former prisoners-of-war one year; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans don’t reach the 100% level until they are much older because their condition has worsened with time; and

WHEREAS, They often pass away due to other then their service-related condition well before they have been receiving the 100% rate for the required length of time; and

WHEREAS, The spouse has usually been the primary care giver and companion for these disabled veterans throughout the veterans lifetime and the VA compensation has been a primary means of support; and
WHEREAS, The surviving spouse in many instances can no longer count on VA benefits for assistance due to a 100% rating of less than ten years; and

WHEREAS, This causes a dramatic change in the quality of life of the surviving spouse; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to reduce the number of years a veteran must be rated 100% from 10 years to 5 years for eligibility to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation payments.

Resolution No. 259: Extend Caregiver Benefits to Include Veterans Before September 11, 2001
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, On March 28, 2009 the VA&R Commission of Illinois passed a resolution regarding caregiver benefits and this resolution was then sent to the Illinois DEC meeting that day and was passed; and

WHEREAS, This resolution was then submitted to the National level and became part of the American Legion’s Legislative Agenda; and

WHEREAS, Congress then passed and the President signed Public Law 111-163, also known as the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010; and

WHEREAS, Title I, Sec. 101 of this law specifies an eligible veteran is an individual who has a serious injury (including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder) incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service on or after September 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, There are many veterans from previous wars and conflicts who have serious injuries incurred or aggravated in the line of duty and are just as deserving of benefits for their caregivers as spelled out in PL 111-163, but are not covered; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to remove the date September 11, 2001 from Public Law 111-163 and revise this law to include all veterans who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements.

Resolution No. 262: Department of Veterans Affairs Provide Service Dog Allowance
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizes the sacrifice made by service men and women who become disabled while serving their country and grants compensation for these injuries; and

WHEREAS, VA has also established additional benefit programs for severely disabled veterans such as Special Adapted Housing Grants, Automobile Allowances; and

WHEREAS, VA has an annual clothing allowance for veterans who must wear prosthetic or orthopedic appliances which tend to wear out their clothing; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans who are blinded or have other special disabilities are issued either a Seeing Eye Dog or Service Dog; and

WHEREAS, The VA covers all needed veterinarian services these dogs may require; and
WHEREAS, There is no current additional benefit to cover the cost of general grooming or feeding of these dogs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly supports legislation to issue an annual Dog Maintenance Allowance to all service-connected disabled veterans who are furnished, through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), either a Seeing Eye Dog or Service Dog; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the VA will set the rate of this annual allowance after researching the average cost of upkeep of these dogs on a national basis.

Resolution No. 263: Include World War II Veterans in Priority Group 6 for Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care

Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Historically when Mexican War and World War I veterans reached advanced age they were provided priority medical care without regards to the other Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) eligibility requirements; and

WHEREAS, The average age of our World War II veterans is 90+ years; and

WHEREAS, The veterans of WWII have served our country honorably both in war and after discharge as exemplary citizens of our great nation and are now at an age when medical services are needed; and

WHEREAS, The current medical services provided to the WWII veterans by VA is based on a category and/or an income means test and many of these veterans who were not a former P.O.W., received a Purple Heart or have a service-connected disability are being denied VA health care due to their income exceeding the means test; and

WHEREAS, It is estimated that over 430 World War II veterans are passing away each day and there are less than 698,000 still remaining; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly supports legislation to amend title 38, USC, Chapter 17, to give the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to automatically enroll World War II veterans (if they are not already enrolled in Priority Groups 1-5) into “Priority Group 6” for the purpose of receiving VA health-care services.

Resolution No. 265: Automatic Waiver for Over-Payments of $300 or Less

Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Veterans sometimes incur overpayments with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) due to the complexity of VA laws and regulations; and

WHEREAS, The majority of these overpayments are not due to any misrepresentation or fraud on the veteran’s part; and

WHEREAS, VA processing of waiver requests through the Committees on Waivers and Compromises and collection of these debts requires significant employee resources and time, printing, mailing, filing, et cetera; and

WHEREAS, Under current regulations, many small overpayment waiver requests are granted; and

WHEREAS, Elimination of processing of small overpayment amounts would allow VA personnel to concentrate on other duties, such as attacking the large claims and appeals
backlog, thus improving the timeliness of delivery of benefits to our deserving veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to grant an automatic waiver for those overpayments of $300 or less if the claimant requests one and there is no obvious indication of fraud or misrepresentation.

Resolution No. 267: Allow Beneficiaries to Retain $90 of Their Benefits While in Medicaid-Covered Nursing Homes
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of war veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, When a veteran without dependents in receipt of pension benefits is covered by Medicaid for nursing home care, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pension is reduced to $90 for incidental expenses; and

WHEREAS, When a surviving parent who is in receipt of parental DIC is similarly covered by Medicaid, there is no provision for VA to reduce the individual’s award for incidental expenses; and

WHEREAS, Under current VA and Medicaid statutes, the service-disabled veteran, helpless child and surviving parent are financially disadvantaged; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to authorize veterans in receipt of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation, or a helpless child in receipt of VA pension or Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), or a surviving parent in receipt of VA parents’ DIC, to keep up to $90 of their monthly VA benefits for incidental expenses while in a Medicaid-covered nursing home.

Resolution No. 268: Urn Markers Provided by the National Cemetery Administration
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides veterans’ headstones and markers for the unmarked veterans’ graves anywhere in the world and the choices range from flat bronze, flat marble, upright granite and upright marble, and also make available niche markers for identifying cremated remains in columbaria; and

WHEREAS, Headstones and markers are inscribed with the name of deceased, branch of service, the years of birth and death and other optional items that may be inscribed are military grade, rank or rate, war era service, months and days of birth and death, an approved emblem of one’s belief and text indicating valor awards; and

WHEREAS, There are no provisions for any such marker for a veteran’s urn when it is the decision of the veteran’s family to not inter the remains of deceased veteran; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation to amend United States Code Title 38 § 2306 to specify that an additional marker be provided for veterans’ urns when an election is made to not bury the ashes of deceased veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That such marker be an appropriate sized adhesive backed metal plate which can be placed on the urn bearing the ashes, as well as providing the same information as the bronze marker now available for burials.

Resolution No. 271: Request Study by the Department of Veterans Affairs on the Medical Effects of Exposure to Depleted Uranium
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation and is always striving to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit program; and

WHEREAS, At first the VA and U.S. Government denied Agent Orange was sprayed in Vietnam, then due to pressure from the American Legion and media started investigations into that chemical; and

WHEREAS, These investigations let to a series of laws granting Vietnam veterans compensation for their exposure and through the VA hospital system set up the Agent Orange registry; and

WHEREAS, At first the U.S. Government denied any long term effects from the fumes from the burning oil wells during the first Gulf War and denied the idea of “undiagnosed illnesses” and again through pressure from the American Legion and media, laws were put into place to compensate veterans from the Iraq War with these “undiagnosed illnesses”; and

WHEREAS, Depleted uranium (DU) ordinance was used during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and has left traces throughout those countries; and

WHEREAS, The military services have used DU in shells fired from tank and aircraft cannons against enemy armor; and

WHEREAS, DU burns after hitting a target, releasing aerosolized uranium particles into the air, exposing troops who come in contact with the target; and

WHEREAS, Our brave soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, many with multiple deployments, have been exposed to DU and they are coming home and developing many rare diseases (including Sacramatoid Renal Sarcoma) at a much higher percentage than the general population; and

WHEREAS, The movie “Beyond Treason” by William Lewis depicted in part the horrible effects of DU and this movie went on to win the Berkeley Film Festival Award in 2005; and

WHEREAS, The scientific community and the Armed Forces do not have adequate medical or exposure information to determine the exact long term health effects caused by exposure to aerosolized DU particles; and

WHEREAS, DU munitions were fired at, and destroyed, thousands of Iraqi tanks and vehicles during the Gulf War, scattering tons of depleted uranium throughout the theater of operations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Department of Veterans Affairs conduct peer-reviewed scientific studies to determine what medical conditions may be linked to depleted uranium exposure, establish a depleted uranium registry similar to the Agent Orange registry and if the studies show a greater incident of certain rare diseases e.g. Sacramatoid Renal Sarcoma, then legislation be implemented to compensate these veterans.
Resolution No. 272: Extend Dental Care to Veterans with Service Connection of 50% or More
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation and is constantly striving to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit programs; and
WHEREAS, One of the most important veterans benefit is eligibility for VA hospital care and the VA has established a system of priority groups in which the highest priority is assigned to service-connected disabled veterans, former Prisoners Of War (POWs), those who received a Purple Heart, returning combat veterans, etc.; and
WHEREAS, Under this current system any veteran with a combined VA service-connected rating of 50% or more is exempt from copayments for any inpatient or outpatient visits and is also exempt from any copayments for any prescriptions; and
WHEREAS, These same veterans with a rating of 50% or more must pay for any dental services they may need unless they are rated 100% service-connected disabled or former POWs or certain other categories; and
WHEREAS, It seems inequitable to charge these veterans for dental services when everything else is without charge; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to change the eligibility for free dental care to any veteran with a combined Department of Veterans Affairs service-connected rating of 50% or more.

Resolution No. 360: Advance Appropriations for all of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Discretionary Accounts
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, The American Legion supported the 2009 passage of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act which ensures sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans health care by authorizing funding of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical programs one-year in advance; and
WHEREAS, Current proposals before Congress considers expanding advance appropriations to include the following discretionary programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs:
(1) VA Construction, Research, and Information Technology;
(2) National Cemetery Administration;
(3) Veterans Benefits Administration; and
WHEREAS, With the federal budget and appropriations process continuing to break down, as evidenced by stalemates over debt ceilings, sequestration and proposed government shutdowns; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to authorize advance appropriations for all Department of Veterans Affairs’ discretionary appropriations accounts, particularly for Veterans Benefits Administration operations, construction, research, and information technology.

Resolution No. 361: Congress to Provide Back Pay to Veterans and Dependents
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, On October 1, 2013, the United States Congress failed to approve the federal budget, which resulted in the furlough of federal government employees; and
WHEREAS, Compensation payments to more than 3.8 million veterans would have been suspended if the government shut-down extended past October 31, 2013; and
WHEREAS, Pension payments to more than 315,000 veterans and over 202,000 surviving spouses and dependents would not have been distributed if the government shut-down extended past October, 31, 2013; and
WHEREAS, The failure to provide veterans and their families with their earned benefits will result in financial hardship, which could lead to a loss of homes, to include other basic necessities of living, and may result in delinquent credit reporting; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to reinstate any and all federal benefits to include, but not limited to, compensation, pension, education and dependency and indemnity compensation payments, and provide back pay to veterans and surviving spouses and dependents whose payments may be suspended due to government shut-down.

Resolution No. 362: Congressional Budget Office Scoring on Department of Veterans Affairs Leasing
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, In the mid-1990s, Dr. Kenneth Kizer, former Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Health, revolutionized the delivery of health care to our nation’s veterans by opening local community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) to provide outpatient medical care to veterans; and
WHEREAS, CBOCs transformed VA into a health care-based system that became more geographically accessible to veterans; and
WHEREAS, Since the mid-1990s, the VA has turned to outpatient clinics as a way to bring health care closer to where veterans live, with 821 clinics to supplement the care provided at 152 medical centers; and
WHEREAS, In FY 2012, H.R. 2646 authorized the VA sufficient appropriations to continue to fund and operate leased facility projects that support our veterans all across the country; and
WHEREAS, The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) abruptly changed its scoring methodology of interpreting leases as operational to capital leases after decades of precedence; and
WHEREAS, In September of 2012, the authorizations for 15 Veterans Health Administration facility leases we re eliminated from a construction bill due to the scoring change initiated by the CBO; and
WHEREAS, Approximately 27 leases are impacted for FY 2013 and FY 2014 as well as a number of future leases that are set to expire; and
WHEREAS, Based on the scoring change, funding for these leases must be accounted for up-front; and
WHEREAS, VA would see a detrimental impact on its budget and medical care program without the leases; and
WHEREAS, This technical book-keeping ruling prevents Congress from enacting important authorizations to renew and establish new leases; and
WHEREAS, If no action is taken to resolve the issue, veterans will ultimately suffer increased delays and diminished access to needed medical care and services; inefficiencies in their continuum of care, and veterans' care will negatively be impacted by increased costs of duplication of services and contracted care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion request that Congress provide an annual or permanent exemption for the
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Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leases from the Congressional Budget Office’s scoring process, so as to give flexibility to VA to meet the health-care needs of veterans.

Resolution No. 363: Consolidation of Department of Veterans Affairs Care in the Community Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes in a strong robust veterans’ health-care system that is designed to treat the unique needs of those men and women who have served their country; and

WHEREAS, Even in the best of circumstances there are situations where the system cannot keep up with the health care needs of the growing veteran population requiring Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) services, requiring veterans to seek care in the community; and

WHEREAS, The VA has implemented a number of non-VA care programs to manage veterans’ health care when such care is not available at a VA facility, could not be provided in a timely manner, or is more cost effective through contracting vehicles; and

WHEREAS, Programs such as Fee-Basis, Project Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH), Patient Centered Community Care (PC3), and the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) were enacted by Congress to ensure eligible veterans could be referred outside the VA for needed, and timely, health care services; and

WHEREAS, It has become apparent that layering yet another program on top of the numerous existing non-VA care programs, each with their own unique set of requirements, resulted in a complex and confusing landscape for veterans and community providers, as well as the VA employees that serve and support them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to enact legislation that provides the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to consolidate its multiple care in the community programs provided:

- VA standardizes its reimbursement rates, but not set the rates too low where providers are discouraged in partnering with the VA in providing needed health-care services to veterans outside the VA health care system;
- It does not circumvent the VA infrastructure or health-care system entirely;
- All payment claims are made electronically by January 1, 2019;
- Eligible veterans receive timely quality health care, including all specialty and ancillary services deemed necessary as part of the treatment recommended; and
- VA is authorized to pay for an enrolled veterans non-VA emergency or urgent medical care when, at no fault of the veteran, the veteran is unable to obtain VA emergency medical care or services.

Resolution No. 364: Department of Veterans Affairs to Develop Outreach and Peer to Peer Programs for Rehabilitation
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, One of The American Legion’s founding principles is Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion considers itself to be a partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs in ensuring that our nation’s military members and veterans have access to the best health care available; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the unemployment rate of returning servicemembers is 9.0% compared to approximately 7.0% for their civilian counterparts; and
WHEREAS, Citizen soldiers often return from combat duty and immediately resume civilian life without access to readjustment services of Veterans Affairs facilities; and

WHEREAS, The stated goal of the Veterans Affairs regarding mental health is to move away from the maintenance model of treatment and transition to the recovery model; and

WHEREAS, The Veterans Affairs recognizes that the most important aspect of the recovery-oriented model is peer to peer support; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to call on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop a national program to provide peer to peer rehabilitation services based on the recovery model tailored to meet the specialized needs of current generation combat-affected veterans and their families; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop effective service partnerships with community mental health and addictions agencies to expand access to mental health services for National Guard members and reservists living in rural America; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continue to exert maximum effort to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs utilizes returning servicemembers for positions as peer support specialists in the effort to provide treatment, support services and readjustment counseling for those veterans requiring these services.

Resolution No. 365: Fit to Serve Initiative

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Hearing loss and tinnitus rank as the two most prevalent service-connected disabilities for veterans receiving federal compensation over the last four years; and

WHEREAS, The high demand for Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) audiology services is growing at a rate of nearly 10% per year, and the VA is unable to meet that demand under its current system; and

WHEREAS, As a result of the claims backlog and limited VA sites, many veterans are experiencing long wait times for appointments, long distances to travel to the nearest VA facility, and limited hearing aid adjustment and follow-up services; and

WHEREAS, Currently the VA does not employ hearing aid specialists in their audiology clinics, as Title 38 U.S.C. does not give the VA express authority to hire hearing aid specialists; and

WHEREAS, Hearing aid specialists are state-licensed, health-care professionals who have undergone training and accreditation processes, which typically includes successful completion of an apprenticeship training period, a distance learning course, comprehensive written and practical examinations to test knowledge and clinical competency, and tests of state and federal laws related to the fitting and sale of hearing aids; and

WHEREAS, In the private marketplace, licensed hearing aid specialists perform hearing evaluations, and dispense, fit, adjust and repair hearing aids for about 50% of the public; and

WHEREAS, The VA currently recognizes these professionals in its fee-for-service policy to provide hearing aid evaluations, and hearing aid fitting, dispensing, adjustments and repairs, yet due to existing restrictions, VA clinics rarely utilize these providers; and

WHEREAS, Inclusion of the nation’s 9,000 licensed hearing aid specialists in the VA’s provider network could significantly expand accessibility as they often operate in rural areas, and perform nursing home and in-home visits; and
WHEREAS, The increased use of hearing aid specialists by the VA could lead to shorter appointment wait times, more convenient care, and increased follow-up services for veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Fit to Serve program (www.fittoserve.us), established by the International Hearing Society, seeks to increase veterans’ access to hearing aid specialists; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the Fit to Serve initiative and federal legislation that expands the Department of Veterans Affairs’ authority to hire and utilize hearing aid specialists to perform hearing aid testing and fitting and dispensing services.

Resolution No. 366: Honoring Those Who Have Earned the Medal of Honor
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 371 (Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation))

WHEREAS, The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, The recipients have earned this award by displaying heroism and bravery while risking their lives during service to this great nation; and

WHEREAS, Associated with earning the award, Medal of Honor recipients are entitled to a monthly pension of $1,299.61 as of December 1, 2014; and

WHEREAS, Recently introduced legislation aims to increase the monthly pension for Medal of Honor recipients to $3,000.00; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion fully appreciated the service of those awarded the Medal of Honor; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that would expand the benefits to Medal of Honor recipients.

Resolution No. 367: Include Korean War Veterans in Priority Group 6 for Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Mexican War and WWI veterans were provided priority medical care on reaching advance age; and

WHEREAS, There are no surviving Mexican and WWI veterans; and

WHEREAS, As of 2014, the US Census Bureau reports that there are less than two million living Korean War veterans; and

WHEREAS, As of 2016, the average age of the Korean (forgotten-war) veteran is 84 years; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code (USC) fails to provide reasonable care to Korean (forgotten-war) veterans who are passing away at a high rate per day; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38, USC, to give the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to enroll Korean (forgotten-war) veterans in “Priority Group 6” unless already enrolled in a higher Priority Group, for the purpose of receiving VA health-care services; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion strongly supports this legislation, asking Congress to amend Title 38 to include Korean veterans.
Resolution No. 368: Increase the Transparency of Asbestos Claims
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Veterans comprise up to 30 percent of deaths from asbestos-caused lung cancer, which can occur decades after exposure; and
WHEREAS, The flame-retardant material was widely used in Navy ships and buildings until 1980; and
WHEREAS, Companies that produced it, and sometimes hid its dangers, were forced to set up trusts over the years that have paid out at least $17.7 billion to more than three million victims who were sickened; and
WHEREAS, Trial attorneys have been able to file multiple claims with different funds on behalf of the same victims; and
WHEREAS, Every dollar that leaves the trust funds through fraud reduces future awards for legitimate claims; and
WHEREAS, Asbestos trust funds must be protected from future fraud claims through further transparency, but not at the cost of invading veterans’ private information; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation requiring public disclosure by trusts regarding the receipt and disposition of claims for injuries based on exposure to asbestos while protecting veterans’ private medical and work history, as well as Social Security numbers; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress continues to assure adequate compensation for veterans harmed by asbestos and deserve compensation.

Resolution No. 369: Restore VA’s Informal Claims and Appeals Process
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 376 (Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation))

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, Since the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) first started processing claims it has always accepted any written correspondence from a veteran or claimant as an informal claim, as long as the correspondence was signed, the benefit sought stated or implied and the veteran’s name was identifiable; and
WHEREAS, Once this informal claim was received, the VA allowed the claimant one entire year to finalize the claim by using the appropriate claim form; and
WHEREAS, With this procedure in place our veterans and claimants have become used to simply sending in letters stating they want an increase in their benefits or wish to appeal a VA decision and the VA would accept these letters and establish an official “date of claim” or “notice of disagreement”; and
WHEREAS, In March and April of 2015 the VA changed its procedures and has issued two new forms which the veteran or claimant must now use; and
WHEREAS, These forms are a 21-0966 “Intent to file a Claim for Compensation and/or Pension, or Survivors Pension and /or DIC” and a 21-0958 “Notice of disagreement”; and
WHEREAS, If these forms are not used the VA will not accept any other correspondence as an informal claim or appeal; and
WHEREAS, Because of this many of our veterans and claimants may lose valuable months of possible entitlement or not have their appeals received in a timely manner; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to modify its current procedures to return to the previous acceptance of any written correspondence from our veterans or claimants as an “informal claim or appeal” allowing them one year to finalize this action.

Resolution No. 370: Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselors and Marriage Family Therapists
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Licensed professional mental health counselors (LPMHCs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs) comprise over 40 percent of the mental health workforce, totaling more than 175,000 mental health professionals; and

WHEREAS, All 50 states license LPMHCs and MFTs to independently deliver clinical mental health services to individuals, families and groups, providing diagnosis and treatment of mental and addictions disorders, psychotherapy, counseling, and the full range of behavioral health services offered by all mental health professionals; and

WHEREAS, Congress passed legislation recognizing LPMHCs and MFTs as qualified mental health professionals within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2006, and VA released qualification standards authorizing the hiring of these professions in 2010; and

WHEREAS, As of August 31, 2012, there were 28 LPMHCs and 69 MFTs onboard in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and since then, VHA has more than tripled the number of LPMHCs to 90 onboard providers and increased by 55% the number of MFTs to 107 onboard providers; and

WHEREAS, The VA’s primary recruitment program, the trainee support program, provides over $100 million in financial stipends, including $36 million for social work and psychology trainees, and trains more than 3,000 mental health professionals annually; and

WHEREAS, The VA trainee support program does not recognize LPMHCs or MFTs for financial stipends, and the VA has stated that it will not add the professions to the program; and

WHEREAS, Research demonstrates that LPMHCs and MFTs are more likely to practice in rural and underserved areas that lack social workers, psychologists or other mental health professionals, so exclusion from the VA workforce and trainee support program decreases veterans’ access to behavioral health care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the inclusion of licensed professional mental health counselors (LPMHCs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs) as funded associated health trainees through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) trainee support program; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation directing VA to provide financial stipends to LPMHCs and MFTs through the VA trainee support program and increase the hiring of these mental health professionals.

Resolution No. 372: Oppose Closing or Privatization of Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care System
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion began its support for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1930, even before there was a VA, by lobbying Congress to consolidate
and coordinate government activities affecting war veterans by creating the Veterans Administration as a federal entity; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion fought hard for the elevation of the Veterans Administration to cabinet-level status in 1989, arguing that veterans deserve representation at the highest levels of the government; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has kept close watch on the quality of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system through the System Worth Saving program; and

WHEREAS, The System Worth Saving program has evolved into a full-service benefits delivery and watchdog program that has helped educate the federal government and veterans as to the strengths and weaknesses of VA's health-care system and the services it is responsible for delivering to veterans; and

WHEREAS, The program has garnered presidential praise while influencing congressional action and administrative regulation; and

WHEREAS, Recent discussion by groups such as the congressionally created Commission on Care have considered closing VA medical centers and transitioning veterans into the private sector for health care; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Care's proposed strawman document recommends that "the most obsolete and underutilized facilities should be closed and those patients transferred to local providers"; and

WHEREAS, Transforming the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to more private care would not only be disadvantageous to our nation's veterans, but it would not be cost effective according to a Congressional Budget Office report titled "comparing the cost of the veterans' health-care system with private sector costs"; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion does not believe VA should close any of its existing medical centers simply as a method of generating savings; and

WHEREAS, VA is prohibited from billing and collecting Medicare reimbursements for the treatment of non-service connected medical conditions of enrolled Medicare-eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, Programs such as Fee-Basis, Project Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH), Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3), and the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) were enacted by Congress to ensure eligible veterans could be referred outside the VA for needed, and timely, health-care services; and

WHEREAS, It has become apparent that layering yet another program on top of the numerous existing non-VA care programs, each with their own unique set of requirements, resulted in a complex and confusing landscape for veterans and community providers, as well as the VA employees that serve and support them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion opposes any legislation or effort to close or privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress enact legislation that provides the VA the authority to consolidate its multiple non-VA community care programs; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress enact legislation that would allow veterans to use their Medicare health-care coverage, or private health care coverage, when receiving medical care or services in a VHA health-care facility, and Medicare be authorized to reimburse VA for such medical care and services; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion remain open to further discussion on the possibility of expanding and improving VA's health-care services.
Resolution No. 373: Oppose Lump Sum Payments for Department of Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation is paid monthly to an eligible veteran at a rate commensurate with diminished earning capacity resulting from the effects of service-connected disease or injury; and

WHEREAS, Such compensation is designed to provide continuous relief from the service-connected disability for as long as the veteran continues to suffer its effects at a compensable level, usually for the rest of the veteran's life; and

WHEREAS, By law, the rate of compensation is determined by the level of disability present, thereby requiring reevaluation of the disability upon a change in its degree; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans may start out with a lower rating, but as they age the degree of disability worsens; and

WHEREAS, There is some discussion in Congress on having the VA consider establishing lump sum payments for veterans with disability ratings of 20 percent or less; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans who are first discharged from the military and have a service-connected disability are usually in a financial bind and would find a lump-sum payment enticing, and would not focus on the long range implications of this decision e.g. later increases, added stipend for having dependents, secondary service-connected disability, to name a few; and

WHEREAS, Such lump-sum payments would not, on the whole, be in the best interests of disabled veterans but would be for government savings and convenience; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion oppose any recommendation, legislative or otherwise, to establish lump-sum payments of Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation.

Resolution No. 374: Priority Care for Medal of Honor Recipients
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, From the Civil War to the present Global War on Terror, this decoration has recognized those servicemembers who performed acts of uncommon valor far above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, The recipients have earned this award by displaying heroism and bravery while risking their lives during service to this great nation; and

WHEREAS, Currently, veterans awarded the Medal of Honor are assigned to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Priority Group 3 for enrollment in VA health care; and

WHEREAS, Due to limited funds, the VA set up Priority Groups to make sure that certain groups of veterans are able to be enrolled before others; and

WHEREAS, Medal of Honor recipients should be assigned the highest priority status for hospital care and medical services provided through the VA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to assign Medal of Honor recipients to Enrollment Priority Group 1 for Department of Veterans Affairs health care.
Resolution No. 375: Prosecution of VA Employees Engaged in Fraudulent Practices in the Department of Veterans Affairs  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  

WHEREAS, The American Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger, called for a leadership change at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and specifically called for the resignations of Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Under Secretary of Health Robert Petzel and Under Secretary of Benefits Allison Hickey due to poor oversight and failed leadership; and  
WHEREAS, It is widely reported that a number of VA hospitals have engaged in various waiting list schemes and procedural bypasses for the specific purpose of overstating organizational effectiveness and hence awarding bonuses or other consideration to specific employees; and  
WHEREAS, An undetermined number of veterans have been denied timely medical care resulting in death or unnecessary deterioration of their health; and  
WHEREAS, A culture of indifference and fraud permeates some VA facilities in violation of medical oaths, fiduciary responsibility and moral codes; now, therefore, be it  

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion continues to advocate for the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to press for a special prosecutor to be assigned to investigate and vigorously prosecute any Department of Veterans Affairs employees engaged in fraudulent practices designed to improperly award bonuses or other financial or meritorious awards to the perpetrator.

Resolution No. 377: Support for Veteran Quality of Life  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  

WHEREAS, The American Legion was charted and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness; and  
WHEREAS, Through the first pillar of The American Legion, thousands of American Legion accredited service officers and other professional staff work diligently to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits and care they have earned and deserve through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA); and  
WHEREAS, As the nation’s largest veterans service organization, The American Legion is often called upon to support legislation expanding veterans benefits through the VHA, VBA, and NCA either through testimony or letter of support; and  
WHEREAS, The American Legion may not always have a specific resolution addressing future legislation; and  
WHEREAS, When legislation is aimed at directly enhancing veterans’ quality of life by expanding their VHA, VBA, or NCA benefits, The American Legion needs be ready to firmly support; now, therefore, be it  

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to enact legislation and programs within the VA that will enhance, promote, restore or preserve benefits for veterans and their dependents, including, but not limited to, the following: timely access to quality VA health care, timely decisions on claims and receipt of earned benefits, and final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorates their service.
Resolution No. 378: United States Census to Include Veterans Information  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and  
WHEREAS, For over 225 years our brave men and women have served this country in the Armed Forces of the United States; and  
WHEREAS, Every ten years the U.S. Census is taken and does not ask U.S. citizens to identify if they have served in the active military, national guard or reserves; and  
WHEREAS, Veterans benefits, e.g. national cemeteries, community-based outpatient clinics, are allocated to states based on veterans population which is currently estimated based on sampling; and  
WHEREAS, Each census therefore does not accurately reflect true veterans, National Guard and Reserve populations in this country and as a result inaccuracies exist; and  
WHEREAS, This is a disservice to the men and women who have served out country in times peace and war; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly support any legislation that mandates the U.S. Census Bureau to include veteran, National Guard and Reserve data on any future census.

Resolution No. 379: Veteran Caretaker Stipend  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation  
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of wartime veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and  
WHEREAS, After veterans are released from service they are able to apply for Department of Veterans Affairs compensation for their injuries and illnesses related to their active duty service; and  
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women who become disabled while serving their country and grants them compensation for their injuries; and  
WHEREAS, The majority of our disabled veterans who receive compensation usually continue to work and those that have difficulty finding employment can ask to be retrained under the Vocational Rehabilitation program; and  
WHEREAS, Veterans who are rated permanently and totally disabled due to unemployability at the 100% rate can have their spouses go back to school to get an education which hopefully will lead to gainful employment for them; and  
WHEREAS, For those veterans rated 100% unemployable, their spouse may have to find employment to help supplement the household income and in cases if they have minor children may have to pay for child care; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion will support legislation to grant a $1,000.00 monthly stipend to the working spouses of veterans determined to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions requiring spouses to forgo work to stay at home to care for their veteran requiring aid and attendance.
Resolution No. 380: Exempt Funds Related to Interment Services at Cemeteries from any Future Sequestration

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Our country has a proud history of honoring deceased veterans by providing burials in cemeteries paid at the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) expense; and

WHEREAS, When a serviceman or woman dies on active duty there are additional benefits available to the surviving spouse and/or family; and

WHEREAS, In these killed in action or active duty deaths cases those benefits include a $100,000 death gratuity normally paid out to help tide the family over until survivor benefits kick in and also a year’s worth of housing allowance, typically paid in a lump sum to the surviving spouse or dependent children of a service person; and

WHEREAS, During the recent federal government budget problems we experienced sequestration of funds; and

WHEREAS, This put a halt to these above-mentioned benefits and families were unable to bury their loved ones in a timely manner and unable to secure these monetary benefits, causing greater personal financial pressure and problems during their time of grief; and

WHEREAS, Families who wished to have their loved ones interred in a cemetery, paid at VA expense also experienced delays in burial; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion promote and support legislation to have all benefits paid, at time of death to the surviving families of those killed in action or died on active duty, and funds related to interment services at cemeteries be exempt from any future sequestration of laws.

Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 184 (GA): Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Increase the Special Monthly Compensation (k) Award

Resolution No. 256 (IL): Add Agent Orange Component to Code of Federal Regulations 4.16

Resolution No. 257 (IL): Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Increase the Special Monthly Compensation (k) Award

Resolution No. 260 (IL): Special Monthly Compensation (k) Award

Resolution No. 276 (IL): Surviving Families Benefits

Received and Recorded Resolutions

Resolution No. 116 (MD): Designate United States Air Force C-123K Transport Aircraft as Agent Orange Exposure Sites

Resolution No. 196 (OH): Urn Markers Provided by the National Cemetery Administration

Resolution No. 381 (IL): Extended Hours and Weekends for Veterans’ Healthcare

Rejected Resolutions

Resolution No. 46 (ME): Expansion of VA’s Statutory Definition of Period of War

Resolution No. 158 (ND): Full Practice Authority of All Advanced Practice Registered Nurses
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Resolution No. 159 (PA): Oppose Closing or Privatization of Department of Veterans’ Affairs Health Care System

Resolution No. 192 (WA): In-State Licensure for VA Healthcare Providers

Resolution No. 264 (IL): Request the Rating Schedule for Tinnitus be Changed

Resolution No. 275 (IL): Establish Minimum Compensation for all Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans’ Due to Hearing Loss

DELEGATE BOZELLA (CO): Mr. Commander, I, Ralph P. Bozella of Colorado as a duly elected and registered delegate to this Convention move for the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Chairman Ralph. I heard a motion on the floor. Do I hear a second? ... Second. Is there any discussion? All in favor? Opposed? The report of the Veterans Affair and Rehabilitation is adopted.

Announcement of Winning Department
William F. Lenker National Service Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: With the adoption of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation report, it is time to announce the winner of the William F. Lenker National Service Trophy. William F. Lenker was the Chairman of The American Legion National VA&R Commission from 1967 until 1988. He was a true champion for America’s veterans. This trophy is awarded annually to the department that best supports and implements programs to benefit veterans, their families and their survivors. For the 2015-2016 program year, the trophy is awarded to the Department of Wisconsin. (Cheers)

DELEGATE KURTZ (WI): Thank you. Commander, on behalf of the Department of Wisconsin, Immediate Past Commander Dale Oatman, Commander Dan Seehafer, and our Department Service Officer James Fialkowski, we just want you to know that we are proud of the service we deliver Wisconsin veterans. We are humbled by this recognition, and we are grateful for the opportunity to still serve America. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Some announcements before we close. The Child Welfare Foundation donations will be collected after the Children & Youth report tomorrow. Operation Comfort Warriors donations will follow the National Security report. National Emergency Fund donations will follow the membership awards.

Tomorrow we will have the Democratic candidate for president of the United States. Doors will open at 0700 hours. Thursday we will have the Republican candidate for president of the United States. Doors will open at 0630 hours. Remember, we are a nonpartisan organization and we treat all of our guests with dignity and respect. I know that I can count on all of you to represent our organization well, which means we will show every speaker the utmost courtesy. Security will be in place, and long lines are expected. So please get here early.

Legionnaires, please join me in a salute to the flag of the United States of America.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The time is now 16:07 hours. The convention will stand in recess until 8:30 a.m. tomorrow. Have a wonderful evening. Thank you all.

... At 4:07 p.m., the Convention was recessed to reconvene the following day, August 31, 2016, at 8:30 a.m.
PROCEEDINGS
SECOND DAY

Wednesday, August 31, 2016

... At 8:30 a.m. the delegates assembled for the second day of the 98th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Convention will come to order. Would everyone please rise for rendering honors to our nation’s Flag, hand salute.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Two! Please uncover. At this time I call, for the invocation, on Acting National Chaplain Randy Cash from the Department of North Carolina. Ladies and gentlemen, please remain uncovered.

Invocation
Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North Carolina, Acting National Chaplain

Let us pray together. Eternal God whose way is the sea, whose paths are in the great waters, whose command is over all, and whose love never fails, we come into Your presence this morning, O Lord, with thankful hearts. We give You thanks for the bounty of Your blessing, for the opportunity of service, for the sharing of common goals, and for the love of families and friends. We pray for our servicemen and women around the globe today and their families. We ask Your strength and guidance throughout this day that we may do our best to serve You and each other in all of our tasks. For this I pray, amen.

Pledge of Allegiance
Daniel L. Zimmerman, Georgia, National Sergeant-at-Arms

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Chaplain Cash. Ladies and gentlemen, please remain standing as Sergeant-At-Arms Daniel L. Zimmerman of Georgia leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

... At this time, the delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

USAA was founded by veterans and holds strong to its mission of facilitating the financial security of military families, and its core values of service, loyalty, honesty and integrity. Before joining USAA, our next guest served in the United States Army for 37 years, retiring as a command sergeant major. A combat engineer, he deployed to Honduras, Somalia, Kosovo and Iraq. He made multiple command visits to Iraq and Afghanistan and deployed in support of relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. He is currently the military affairs relations director of USAA. The American Legion is proud of its relationship with USAA, a company that shares our values. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Bob Winzenried of USAA.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

Address: CSM Robert Winzenried, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Military Affairs Relationship Director, USAA

Well, in the Army we always say hooah when we see a great video or have a great story. Anybody that's been in the Army knows that hooah means anything but no. So
thank you this morning. And you've got to help me out this morning. I know a lot of you spent a lot of time at the bar last night checking out the adult beverages. And I know you're a little tired, stood in a long line. But I really want to get a selfie with all of you. So if you could hold on a minute, let me get my phone hooked up here. I know everyone is going to smile, right. Here we go. All right. Hoohah. Thanks for that. I saw somebody in the back wasn't smiling, though. I caught you.

Hey, good morning, all of you. To all of my fellow Legionnaires, thanks for giving me the opportunity to address you this morning. It is truly an honor and I very much appreciate the chance to be here with all of you. I wanted to talk to you this morning about some of the things I learned during my over 37 years as an enlisted soldier in the United States Army.

Like many of you, I started out as a young man looking to get something more out of life. In my case, I was a long-haired hippy dude with a wife and a young son who knew that the life we were living was not what I wanted for our young family. One afternoon I watched that great Army movie classic, "Stripes," with Bill Murray and decided the Army was exactly where I wanted to be. That's for all my Marine brothers out there. I am sure there are a few who did the same.

From the time I joined I have had the opportunity to go from a Private E-1 all the way through to the command's Senior Enlisted Leader for a combined and combatant command. Along the way I have always enjoyed the fact that I was a leader of our most precious resource, the young men and women who have volunteered to serve our great country. And, oh, by the way, as you heard yesterday from General Dunford, the last 15-plus years they've continued to sign up with the full knowledge and expectation that they would deploy and serve in a combat zone.

When America talks of the greatest generation, they are typically referring to those that served during World War II. And that is a well-deserved distinction, as those who served during that difficult time truly saved the world from extreme evil. I would also suggest that every succeeding generation has contributed in their own great way, from those who served in Korea, Vietnam, the numerous Cold War skirmishes to those who currently serve in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan and other locations too numerous to mention, all can stake a claim to that moniker when it comes to military service.

I believe that in decades to come, the young people serving today will also be looked upon as a great generation. Our greatest generation of World War II was supported and backed by an entire nation who sacrificed in their own way to support those in uniform and contributed to their eventual victory over our enemies. I only wish that Americans had that same level of commitment today in our current fight.

My point is that every generation has had young men and women who are willing to serve. We should be proud of the fact that these young men and women, just like previous generations, still are answering the call to defend our country and our way of life. But we are seeing the numbers of these who are willing or capable of serving dwindle.

It amazes me and should trouble all of us that less than 1 percent of our population serves in our Armed Forces today. I think we can help our military when it comes to recruiting the best to join it. I can tell you as a young'un hearing about the exploits of all the men and women who served in the military that it had a huge influence on my signing up. I think we have too many veterans who are not willing to share their military experiences, both the good and the bad, with our youth.

I often heard in my last job that the best protection for America was to conduct the fight as an away game, not here in America. We need to continue to encourage service to the nation as a noble endeavor. To quote an American military icon, General George S. Patton, Jr., “The soldier is the Army. No army is better than its soldiers. The soldier is also a citizen. In fact, the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one's country.”
I believe we need every generation to understand and be willing to serve this nation. We have too many young people who truly fail to understand selfless service and that it is thinking of yourself less. It is putting the needs of others before yourself.

I had the opportunity to talk with Mr. Tom McGinnis after a ceremony where his son, Ross, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously. He described Ross as a good kid who always wanted to be a soldier. He signed up a day after his 17th birthday. He was neither the star athlete, nor the greatest academically and was looking for some structure in his life. So to Ross the Army seemed like a great option. I think we all know young men and women like Ross, and I think none of us would have predicted that he looked anywhere near our picture of what a hero, in our mind, would look like.

On that fateful day, Ross was the gunner in the last vehicle of a mounted combat patrol manning a 50-caliber machine gun. As they were proceeding down their designated patrol route, an insurgent tossed a grenade into the gunner's hatch of the Humvee he was riding in. Ross tried to bat it away but he missed it. He hollered "grenade!" and could have exited the vehicle to safety. In fact, Ross was the only one of the five soldiers in that vehicle that could have escaped. Ross, recognizing that he was the only one who knew where the grenade had landed and that he was the only one who could cover the grenade, chose to throw his body on the grenade, absorbing the blast. He was just a kid from his generation who answered the call and paid the ultimate price for his country and his brothers in arms. In doing so, Ross was killed by the blast, saving his comrades. Ross to me exemplifies selfless service.

And I paraphrase John 15:13: "For there is no greater act than to lay down your life for another." Now, you ask, isn't that an extreme case? And how can I or anyone else, unless placed in that situation, live up to Ross's example? I would agree that no one knows, and I hope you never have to find out. But, I want to challenge all of us to live up to this example. I challenged all of my soldiers and their leaders for my entire career to continue to pass on the desire to place service before self.

That's what Ross did and because of it four of his comrades are alive today. You all are serving today, maybe not in the military but you are still serving our nation and our military just by the simple fact that you are leaders and members of The American Legion. You have all volunteered to continue to serve our nation in the best way you can. Your efforts in support of our currently serving military members, our veterans and their families are truly outstanding. I am proud to be a member of the Legion. As a veteran I can think of no better way than to continue to serve except for the fact that I now work for a company that truly knows what it means to serve.

I would like to thank the leadership of the American Legion for the opportunity to address you all this morning. And I would like to leave you with one of my favorite quotes from President Teddy Roosevelt: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

Thank you all for what you have done in the past for our great nation, and thanks for all you continue to do as Legionnaires. God bless The American Legion and God bless America. My name is Bob, and I am a soldier. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Command Sergeant Major, I've got to tell you I'm a 42-year member of USAA. I understand your core values. I understand your commitment to still serving veterans. And on behalf of The American Legion, I'd like to present to you this medallion on behalf of all these wonderful people out there in the audience. Thank you so much for your service and your continued service to our members.

America is blessed to have so many amazing and dedicated police officers and firefighters. These are men and women who are willing to sacrifice their lives to keep us
safe. Their split-second decisions can mean life or death and often invite intense scrutiny. The two men that we are about to honor pass that scrutiny with flying colors.

Our 2016 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year has dedicated the last 27 years to fighting crime in his community. A veteran of an Airborne Ranger unit of the Texas National Guard and of an infantry unit of the Illinois National Guard, he is the sergeant-at-arms for American Legion Post 120 in Effingham, Illinois. In addition to solving numerous crimes and removing hundreds of impaired drivers from Illinois streets and highways, he has been a major fundraiser for Special Olympics. He has been the sheriff of Effingham County, Illinois, since December 1, 2014. Ladies and Gentlemen, please give a warm round of applause to our Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Sheriff David J. Mahon. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of the National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year upon David J. Mahon for outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through heroic acts, community service and professional achievement thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase: America’s Finest. You reflect great credit upon yourself, Effingham County Sheriffs Office of Illinois and law enforcement officers everywhere. Presented by The American Legion at the 2016 American Legion National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I will not read all the whereas clauses of this state of Illinois Executive Department proclamation, but: Therefore, I, Bruce Rauner, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim August 31, 2016, as Sheriff David Mahon Day in Illinois. In witness thereof I have put my hand and caused a great seal of the state of Illinois to be affixed, done in the capital of the city of Springfield, this 19th day of August in the year of our Lord 2016 in the state of Illinois. Let's give him a big round of applause. (Applause)

Presentation: 2016 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year
David J. Mahon, Effingham County Sheriff's Office, Effingham, Illinois

Thank you. I'm very honored and blessed to stand here today before you and receive this recognition. I want to thank you all for this award. I would like to thank The American Legion for their continued support of law enforcement. In light of recent events, it is very important that we stand together as one nation with our brothers and sisters in law enforcement. (Applause)

Like those of you who have served our country, both in times of war and peace, the everyday street cop is the first line of defense against the monsters who want to do us harm. I'd like to thank God for providing me the many opportunities and blessings to pursue a career in law enforcement. And last but certainly not least I would like to thank my wife, Sherri, and my family for their continued support. Through my 27-year career they have made many sacrifices, as do many members of law enforcement families. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Our first responders are never really off duty. On June 10, 2014, a Lakeland, Florida, police officer was shot in the line of duty. Our next guest is a lieutenant with the Lakeland Fire Department, who happened to be driving by the crime scene with his family. Without hesitation, he sprang into action and headed directly toward the scene and provided medical aid to both the wounded officer and the suspect. As a result of the emergency aid administered by our guest and other paramedics, there were no fatalities. Spending 17 years saving lives, our Firefighter of the Year has repeatedly demonstrated a relentless commitment to excellence. His level of training, education and certifications are far too numerous to name here. Responsible for supervising, counseling, training and evaluating his crewmembers in firefighting and
rescue operations, he is also a valued leader in his community and has been recognized for the outstanding support that he has provided to the Lakeland Police Department SWAT team. Ladies and gentlemen, please extend a warm welcome to our National Firefighter of the Year, Matthew A. Brown. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of National Firefighter of the Year to Matt Brown for Outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through heroic acts, community service and professional achievement thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase: America’s Bravest. You reflect great credit upon yourself, Lakeland Fire Department of Florida and firefighters and emergency medical technicians everywhere. Presented by The American Legion at the 2016 American Legion National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Presentation: 2016 National Firefighter of the Year
Matt Brown, Lakeland Fire Department, Lakeland, Florida

Thank you. I'm very humbled and honored to receive such a prestigious award. It means a lot to me and my family. Through all this recognition, some people have called me a hero. I don't feel like I'm a hero. God just put me at the right place at the right time and allowed me to do what I'm trained to do. To me my real heroes are you all, all the sacrifices that you've made through your military careers. If it wasn't for you all, we may not be here today. So I thank you for that sacrifice. (Applause)

I'd also like to thank The American Legion. Thank you. I'd also like to thank The American Legion, the Florida delegation. Especially Post 4. Like I said, it's such an honor. And my family, my wife and daughters, they've had to make a sacrifice for me and my career, and so without them I obviously couldn't do this. Thank you. I will cherish this award for the rest of my life. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Born in Saint-Cloud, France, our next award winner spent the first six years of his life in Normandy. He witnessed firsthand the beginning of the liberation of a continent. He later served in the French Army and eventually started a business in the United States. He holds dual U.S. and French citizenship. As the decades passed, he never forgot the sacrifice that America made on behalf of his native country. During the 40th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, he hosted a luncheon in Indianapolis to honor those veterans. The luncheons and dinners became annual traditions that was spread to other states where he relocated. He was an important advocate for the creation of the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia. And he arranged for the awarding of the French Legion of Honor to 150 American World War II veterans. It is an honor that we will also see extended here today. But first, it is my pleasure to present the 2016 American Legion Patriot Award to Bernard L. Marie. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: For a lifetime of service and devotion to veterans of World War II, you have never stopped expressing your gratitude which was forged while you were a young boy living in Normandy, France, as it was liberated by Allied Forces on June 6, 1944. You proudly served in the French Army, which included a 24-month deployment to Algeria. As a later resident of Indianapolis, Indiana, you hosted a luncheon honoring D-Day veterans to commemorate the 40th anniversary of that fateful day. The luncheons and dinners became an annual tradition that was spread to other states where he relocated. He was an important advocate for the creation of the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia. Through your influence, 150 American World War II veterans received the prestigious Ordre national de la Le ‘gion d’honneur. Your advocacy for those valiant veterans of the Greatest Generation is reflected in The American Legion’s pledge to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars.”
On behalf of the 2.2 million veterans of The American Legion, thank you for your strong support of America’s veterans. Presented this 31st Day of August 2016 at the 98th National Convention. Dale Barnett, National Commander; Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant. (Applause.)

Presentation: The American Legion Patriot Award
Bernard L. Marie

I am pretty sure that my fellow Virginians in this room will recognize the typical Roanoke accent. I don't have any word in French or in English or whatever language adequately to tell you how I am humbled and how I am proud to receive this distinguished award from The American Legion.

For me the greatest generation should never be forgotten. And if I may, I will tell you why. Not only instead of speaking of bad English today, I will speak Russian. There also, thanks to the greatest generation on their success, I finally at five years old find out that I had a father who was doing four years in the French resistance. And when I came to the U.S., I wanted to say thank you every year to the World War II veterans. Thank you so much. I am blessed to have been welcome in your organization. God bless America, God bless The American Legion and thank you so much. (Applause.)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The consul general of France in Chicago is the highest ranking diplomatic official from France in the Midwestern United States. He has a jurisdiction that covers 13 states. With us today is a man who currently holds that position and previously served in Romania, Indonesia, Kenya and Uganda. For the purpose of a presentation, please welcome the consul general of France in Chicago, Vincent Floreani. (Applause)

Presentation: French Legion of Honor
Vincent Floreani, Consul General of France

Thank you very much. I too have a French accent, a stronger one. I'm here to award France's highest medal to two brave men, Mr. Kunnen and Mr. Miller. So, dear Mr. Kunnen, dear Mr. Miller, Commander Barnett, The American Legion representatives and organizers, Cher Monsieur Marie, honored veterans and everyone gathered here today, it is a great honor and privilege to be with you today in Cincinnati for the Annual Convention of The American Legion.

I would like to thank the organizers for allowing me to come to the event and to pay tribute to two great men, two veterans, Mr. Kunnen and Mr. Miller, who were ready to sacrifice their lives for France and Western Europe during the Second World War.

Mr. Miller is represented today by his son, Walter. Mr. Miller sadly passed away yesterday morning. Mr. Miller, please accept my deepest condolences.

This special tribute is also dedicated to all the American soldiers who embarked on a difficult journey to free the whole continent from intolerance, violence and the tyranny of fascism. Before paying this honor, I would like to sincerely congratulate Mr. Bernard Marie, a fellow countryman for the outstanding Patriot Award he has just received. This well-deserved recognition crowns a lifetime of service as an advocate for World War II veterans. (Applause)

Mr. Marie, your deep sense of duty, your loyalty and dedication to the men and women who have fought for our country is an inspiration to all of us. Mr. Marie, you make France proud. Thank you. (Applause)

Seventy-two years ago, many young Americans put their ideals, their might and their courage to the service of the liberation of France to the service of democracy and the dignity of humankind. From June 6, 1944 they fought bravely battle after battle across France. And
like Mr. John Kunnen and Mr. Walter Miller, they witnessed the worst of the war. Many
did not return, but they are in our hearts.

Twice last century, in 1917 and 1941, American soldiers restored freedom to my
country, France. The French people will never forget what they owe America, our steadfast
friend, partner and ally. From Lafayette and Yorktown to the battlefields of World War I
and the shores of Normandy, that is for over 239 years, our two countries have always
stood shoulder to shoulder to defend and promote the values of freedom and democracy
that are the core of what we are. (Applause)

The D-Day Normandy landing changed the course of the history of humanity. Victory
was still far off. There was still much suffering to come, but hope was alive again at last.
Today, it is that same hope, that same ideal that we owe to those men whom we shall never,
can never forget. To the French people, the American veterans are heroes. On behalf of the
French government and the French people, I would like to thank all of you, all the veterans.
Your engagement is an example, an obligation for us and for future generations. There can
be no future without memory. The torch you carried so high and so far, the torch of freedom
of dignity of justice and democracy still lights our way. Faced with the uncertainties of a
changing world, let us strive to remain loyal to the legacy, the sacrifice and the values of
those, of the heroes who liberated France.

The French Legion of Honor shows France's gratitude to all veterans. And Mr.
Kunnen and Mr. Miller deserve this prestigious decoration. (Applause)

Mr. John Kunnen entered active duty in May 1943. He served as a private first class
with the 709 Armored Battalion in D Company where he was a light tank crewman. From
June 1944 until December 1945, Mr. Kunnen fought 331 days in battle in Northern France,
the Rhineland, the Ardennes and Central Europe. In France, Mr. Kunnen took part in the
offensive in Normandy and in the Brittany region.

The Battle for Brest and the Crozon Peninsula campaign were among the fiercest
battles fought on the Western Front. The 709 Tank Battalion suffered many casualties
during the months of August and September 1944 while fighting to eliminate enemy
strongholds and cleaning French ports. The capture of these areas were crucial to the
advance and the victory of the allied forces. Thank you for your service, sir. (Applause)

A few words on Mr. Miller, who sadly passed away yesterday. Mr. Walter Miller
entered active duty in 1942. After completing his parachute air infantry training school in
Fort Benning, Georgia, Mr. Miller was deployed to England where he arrived in March
1944.

He served as a technical sergeant in the 1108 Detachment where he was a fireman and
in charge of land mines. In the early morning of June 6, 1944, Mr. Miller was just 18 years
old. He was parachuting in Normandy, the aircraft carrying the troops from themselves and
the civil antiaircraft enemy fire as soon as they approached the coasts. Mr. Miller landed
on a small crossroads down in Normandy that led to the Utah and Omaha beaches. The
town was Ste. Mere-Eglise. Unfortunately, Mr. Miller was wounded upon landing. I would
like to thank for Mr. Miller for his service, and his son is here today. (Applause)

For their bravery, Mr. Kunnen and Mr. Miller have received prestigious military
 distinctions. Thanks to your courage to France's American friends and allies, France has
been living in peace for seven decades, the longest period of continuous peace in modern
French history.

Seventy-two years ago, along with 800,000 of your fellow countrymen, you left
America for unknown lands at a very young age to participate in the liberation of France.
You were ready to sacrifice your young lives for France's freedom, for a country that was
not even yours. The images of those days are part of our well-collective memory. We'll
always remember the ultimate sacrifice of so many of your comrades who rest on French
soil. Gratitude and remembrance are forever in our souls. Every French person has a special
place in their hearts for you.
In recognition for those heroic actions and to show his gratitude, the president of the French Republic nominated Mr. Kunnen and Mr. Miller for the Legion of Honor. Created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, it's the highest honor that France can be bestowed upon those who have achieved remarkable deeds for France. Mr. Kunnen and Mr. Miller wanted France to be free and they fought to liberate France. For France, these are the highest of deeds. Now I'm going to say a few words in French, a few official words, which will be much easier for me. ...Speaking French.

Thank you for your service. (Applause) ...Speaking French. (Applause)
Thank you to all of you and thank you for your service. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Sir, I want to thank you for honoring all our World War II veterans. I've seen many of these ceremonies across the nation. We appreciate the partnership and friendship with your nation and the honor that you have bestowed on the families and the members of the greatest generation. Thank you, sir. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Nominated by President Obama to serve as the 8th secretary of Veterans Affairs, our next speaker was confirmed for that position by the U.S. Senate on July 29, 2014. He was previously the chairman, president and CEO of the Procter & Gamble Company. Under his leadership, Procter & Gamble added nearly a billion people to its global customer base, and its stock increased 60 percent from 2009 to 2013. A graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, he also earned an MBA from the University of Utah in 1978. While some Washington voices have proposals that would ultimately lead to the dismantling of VA, The American Legion is eager to work with the secretary in demonstrating that VA truly is a system worth saving. (Applause)

So far, the secretary has expanded veteran access by focusing on staffing, space, productivity and community care. Under his leadership, the department has greatly reduced homelessness among veterans. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald. (Applause)

Address: Hon. Robert A. McDonald, Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Thank you. Thank you very much. I want to thank Dale for his leadership of The American Legion and for that kind introduction. What he didn't say was that he was a year ahead of me at West Point, and I owe him dearly because he allowed me to eat. (Laughter)
Let me also recognize Ralph Bozella and also Verna Jones and thank them for their leadership. We worked very frequently with them in Washington, D.C. (Applause)
I'd also like to recognize other members of the Legion's executive office, fellow veterans, colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for that warm introduction.

Over two years ago now, I had my confirmation hearing with the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. I was asked then, “Why do you want to be secretary of Veterans Affairs?” And I told them: There's no higher calling. There's no more noble mission. When President Obama asked, I didn’t hesitate. It's an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of my fellow veterans. At that hearing, I pledged to work to transform VA, improving access to the high-quality care and benefits that Veterans earned and deserve. And I pledged to work with Congress, with our veteran service organizations, and with other stakeholders.

After confirmation, my first stop was Phoenix, and then Las Vegas, Memphis, Reno, Palo Alto, and Charlotte. Across 23 cities, I consulted thousands of veterans, VA employees, and veteran service organization leaders, the American Legion one of the very
first. We talked about how we could shape our MyVA transformation strategy, so VA would best serve veterans. Here’s the point, MyVA isn’t my strategy, it’s yours. It’s not about me, it’s about all of you. It reflects your ideals, your insights, and your innovations.

You’ve heard many times that VA is broken. I disagree. We have challenges, yes. But VA can be transformed. Transformation is well underway, and we’re already seeing results. Changing VA means changing leadership. Fourteen of our top 17 executives are new since I became secretary. These are world-class, enthusiastic business leaders and health-care professionals. Eight of them are veterans themselves. (Applause)

And since March of 2015, our new MyVA Advisory Committee has been hard at work. Committee members have brought extensive experience in customer service and organizational change. They’re leaders in business, medicine, government, and in veteran advocacy.

Among them are veterans like Major General Joe Robles. After 30 years in the Army, Joe was president and CEO for USAA. Another is Dr. Richard Carmona is a Special Forces Vietnam Veteran and was the 17th surgeon general of the United States. Another is Navy veteran Dr. Connie Mariano who was the first military woman to serve as White House physician to the president, the first woman director of the White House Medical Unit, and the first Filipino American in U.S. history to become a Navy rear admiral. (Applause)

These are innovative, resourceful, respected leaders who are advising us on transformation. They know business. They know customer service. And, they know veterans. It’s important you know we’re collaborating with world-class institutions like Johnson & Johnson, USAA, Starbucks, NASA, Kaiser Permanente, Hospital Corporation of America, Virginia Mason, Marriott and Ritz-Carlton, among others. It’s important you know we’re partnered with respected organizations like the YMCA, the Elks, the PenFed Foundation, LinkedIn, Coursera, Google, Walgreens, academic institutions, other federal agencies, and many more.

Over the last two years, we’ve partnered with local leaders to help build a new national network of 76 Community Veterans Engagement Boards. CVEBs for short. CVEB partnerships leverage community assets as well as VA assets to help ensure we implement local solutions to meet veterans’ needs in our communities. Our goal is 100 CVEBs across the country by year’s end. If there’s no CVEB in your community, let’s help make it happen!

Partnerships are the foundation of our progress in ending veteran homelessness. VA working with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, businesses, criminal justice, mental health, nonprofits, local elected officials, community providers, local VSOs, the faith-based community, and philanthropists, to name a few, close to 4,000 public and private partners helping us better meet veteran needs.

We launched our 25 Cities Initiative in March, 2014. A few months later, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Mayors Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness. Over 880 mayors, governors, county and city officials accepted the challenge to end veteran homelessness. These partnerships are why 28 communities and two states have achieved an effective end to veteran homelessness, and why over 360,000 veterans and family members have been housed, rehoused, or prevented from falling into homelessness since 2010. (Applause)

In Los Angeles, the worst city in the country for homelessness, we cut veteran homelessness by more than 30 percent last year, about four times the rate of decline of previous years. Veteran homeless nationwide is down by 47 percent since 2010. We’ve cut it in half. New leadership, innovative collaboration, expanded partnerships, all of that matters.

Now, let me talk about VA health care. You know VA’s the largest integrated health-care system in the country. We have a unique lifetime relationship with our nine million patients, and a single electronic health record across the entire enterprise. Nobody else in
medicine offers that. Our mental health care’s integrated with primary care, with specialty care, and with psycho-social support to minimize barriers and help resolve problems early. Nobody else offers that.

VA health care is whole veteran health care, body, mind, and soul, customized to meet veteran needs. Yoga? Acupuncture? Sports therapy, music therapy, writing and art therapy? We validate and embrace what works to heal veterans. And VA care is integrated with non-medical determinants of health and well-being that people often miss. I’m talking about things like education services, career transition support, fiduciary services, pension resources, disability compensation, and many others. Nobody else offers all of that. Under Secretary of Health Dr. David Shulkin is changing our system to proactive, holistic health care and wellness.

Let me talk about access to VA health care. You should know that more veterans are coming to VA for our care, and waiting less time. Last year veterans had nearly four million more appointments than the previous year. Almost 57 million were in VA facilities, over 16.8 million were VA care in the community appointments. Last March veterans set a record for completed appointments, 5.3 million inside VA. 730,000 more than March 2014, and VA issued 268,000 authorizations for care in the community, twice as many as March 2014. In July, 96 percent of appointments were completed within 30 days of veterans’ preferred date. Eighty-five percent were completed within seven days. And 22 percent were completed the same-day. (Applause)

You should know that average wait time for primary care is around five days, six days for specialty care, and two days for mental health care. And by December, you can expect same day access in primary care and same day access in mental health care. (Applause)

Nobody else offers that. By the way, VA’s the only health-care system that publicly reports on wait times as a measure of access. Ninety percent of veterans we’ve surveyed are “satisfied or completely satisfied” with the timeliness of their care. We won’t be satisfied until we hit 100 percent. (Applause)

So we’re making important progress. But you rarely hear that in the media. You’d never know we lead in many fields of research that benefit all Americans, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, prosthetics, and genetics. You’d never know the American Customer Satisfaction Index rated your National Cemetery Administration No. 1 in customer service five times running. (Applause)

You’d never know J.D. Power rated your mail-order pharmacy best in the country in customer satisfaction six years running. Better than Walmart, better than CVS, better than Walgreens. (Applause)

Not too long ago, all you heard about was our backlog, 611,000 claims more than 125 days old. So, we added staff, adjusted policies, and designed an automated claims processing system. Today the backlog is down almost 90 percent. The average time waiting for a completed claim is down 65 percent. That’s the work of industrious employees and leaders, many of them veterans, but you never read about that. Listening to some people, we’d never know there’s a decent person working at VA, veteran or otherwise.

Well, these last two years I’ve met and talked with thousands of VA employees and leaders in over 330 locations, many of them veterans, like us. They’re people like Cathy DeNobile, a nurse with our D.C. Home-Based Primary Care Office. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas, Cathy takes a holiday dinner to a veteran she cares for who served in Iraq. We was a guard at Abu Ghraib. He’s suffering severe PTSD, and he doesn’t get out of the house much. Chuck Malden’s an emergency room nurse at the Salisbury, North Carolina, VAMC. One day Chuck was treating a veteran for blisters, and he literally gave the veteran the shoes off his feet. Why? Because the veteran needed better shoes. Because Chuck cared. Because that’s what VA is about. (Applause)

Our employees are good people. I’m proud of them. No, they’re not all perfect. But it’s a gross misrepresentation to cherry-pick the worst and hold them up like they represent VA employees, just like it’s a gross misrepresentation to hold up a bad veteran to represent
all of us. It’s a distortion that sells papers, but it’s a distortion that hurts veterans and the good people caring for them.

Some claim there’s no accountability at VA. You don’t think we hold people accountable? Tell that to the VA employee in Augusta, Georgia, recently convicted of falsifying health-care records. He’s facing sentencing that could include years in prison and thousands of dollars in fines. All told, we’ve terminated over 3,755 employees in two years. *(Applause)*

Some people think everything will be fine if we fire more people, more quickly. But that’s just not true. We can’t fire our way to excellence. Over my 33 years in the private sector, I’ve never encountered an organization where firing people was a measure of leadership. We won’t punish people based on opinions, recycled and embellished media accounts, or external pressure. It’s not in the best interest of the veterans we serve. Excellence is what we’re after. So the right dialogue is about forward-looking leadership, and sustainable accountability. Sustainable accountability gives you positive outcomes. That’s leaders and supervisors providing routine feedback, just like in well-led, well-trained military outfits. It’s recognizing what’s going well, coaching and re-training when improvement’s necessary, ensuring employees understand how daily work supports our mission, values, and strategy. It’s training leaders to lead and employees to exceed expectations, every single day. And, it’s taking corrective action when it’s warranted and supported by evidence.

These are pretty simple concepts for veterans. These same principles built the greatest fighting force in history. We’re serious about the work we’re doing for you, and we have the opportunity to look back at 2016 as the year VA turned the corner for veterans.

But there are some things we can’t do without the help of Congress. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a budget nearly equal to the president’s request, but the House proposed a $1.5 billion reduction. That will hurt veterans and impede critical initiatives to transform VA into the high-performing organization you deserve.

You should know there are more than 100 legislative proposals for veterans in the president’s 2017 budget, many vital to maintaining our ability to purchase non-VA health care. Only Congress can modernize and clarify our purchased care authorities to streamline access to community care programs in years ahead. We submitted our plan last October, but we need congressional action to execute it. Only Congress can enact legislation so we can better compete with the private sector, get the best medical professionals to choose to serve you at VA. And perhaps most importantly, only Congress can modernize the archaic appeals process. Last year, the Board was adjudicating an appeal that originated 25 years ago. Under current law, with no significant change in resources, the number of veterans awaiting a decision will soar by 179 percent by 2027, from 500,000 to nearly 1.3 million.

So, with the help of The American Legion and other veterans service organizations, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, we shaped a simplified, streamlined, and fair appeals plan. It’s your plan. Your commander knows this needs to get done. Just a few days ago, he sent out a call to action on this very subject to the members of Congress. Thank you, Dale, for joining us in urging Congress to pass this new law. *(Applause)*

In five years, we could have appeals resolved within one year of filing. The legislation costs nothing, and it will be more efficient and less costly over time. The alternative? More resources dedicated to a broken system. veterans waiting 10 years for a final decision on your appeal. It’s unacceptable to me. I know it’s unacceptable to you. Please join Dale and all of us at VA in getting Congress to act in order to better serve veterans. *(Applause)*

Call your members of Congress, visit their offices while they are home campaigning, write them a letter. Tell them to act on our proposed legislation and get some good things done for veterans. All these proposals require congressional action, and you can help us get them done.
Ninety-five years ago, VSOs helped bring the Veterans Bureau into existence. Nine years later, you helped create the Veterans Administration. You helped get us the GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill and the post-9/11 GI Bill. You’re why President Reagan made VA a department, a member of the Cabinet, giving us “a seat at the table of our national affairs.” And you’re the ones who can keep veterans in control of how, when, and where they wish to be served. And that’s what MyVA is all about.

You’re hearing lots more recommendations about VA’s future. Some come from non-veterans. Some have argued VA can best serve veterans by shutting down VA health care altogether. I suspect that proposal serves some parties somewhere pretty well. But that’s not transformational. It’s more along the lines of dereliction of duty. It doesn’t serve veterans well, and it doesn’t sit well with me. So make sure there’s substance to these discussions, that they’re about veterans’ interests, and not something else. Make sure they’re anchored to the service and sacrifice, the sense of duty and honor that veterans represent, and only veterans understand.

It’s your VA. It always has been. God bless you and your families. God bless the veterans of this country. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for updating us. And also I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity on May 11, when I was invited to testify before that reforming committee of myVA, to give the input of the membership of The American Legion and to be able to have a voice as a veteran, as a veterans service organization, in making our VA better. So thank you, Mr. Secretary, for that. At this time, I yield the podium to National Vice Commander George Cushing, as I have a special personal meeting with Secretary McDonald.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: Thank you, commander.

Military members transitioning home have few priorities that are more important than finding meaningful employment. A number of outstanding employers were recognized by The American Legion at the Veterans Employment and Education Convention Committee Meeting for their work in hiring veterans. But we would like to recognize a couple of our award winners today.

For their outstanding record of hiring veterans in the Large Business category of 200 or more employees, The American Legion recognizes New York Shipping Association based in Edison, New Jersey. Accepting the award is Beverly Fedorko.

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Employer of Veterans 2015, Presented to New York Shipping Association, Incorporated, Edison, New Jersey, for an exceptional record in the employment of veterans. Presented at the 98th Annual National Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 31, 2016.

Presentation: Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans
New York Shipping Association, Inc., Edison, New Jersey

BEVERLY FEDORKO: Good morning. I consider it an honor and a privilege to be here and accept this award on behalf of the men and women of the New York Shipping Association. This recognition is a tribute to the commitment made by NYSA and our industry partners, the International Longshoremen’s Association, to ensure that 51 percent of all newly hired longshore workers would be military veterans. (Applause)

Since 2013, when the hiring plan was implemented, we have put more than 416 veterans to work in the Port of New York and New Jersey, bringing the number of veterans in our workforce to nearly 1,000. (Applause)

The hiring of veterans is a true win-win for the port industry and for veterans alike. It gives our industry the ability to give back to those who have served our country, and our
industry benefits from the experience gained by veterans working in difficult conditions in a highly structured environment.

I thank the New Jersey American Legion for their support, specifically, our friend Bob Looby, and I thank you for this national recognition of the work we have done to hire veterans. I humbly and gratefully accept this award. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: The American Legion is also proud of the men and women who work on behalf of disabled veterans seeking employment. This year I am happy to present the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award to Dwight A. Butler of Fayetteville, North Carolina. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist 2015 Presented to Dwight Butler, Fayetteville, North Carolina, for your outstanding service to the veterans of the state of North Carolina. Presented at the 98th National Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 31, 2016.

Presentation: Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award
Dwight A. Butler, Fayetteville, North Carolina

I'm blessed, truly, truly blessed to have this opportunity. The fact that I'm standing here behind this podium, it's not lost on me that I don't get here without the help of a lot of people out there, and I'd just like to take this opportunity to say thank you. Thank you to the seven gentlemen who work with me daily, who provide me support and work hard to make me look good. Thank you to the best supervisor in the nation. Keeps me grounded. Keeps me on point. Thank God. Thank Almighty God for holding me in His hands, shaping me, helping me to do His work. And, lastly, thank the sailors, soldiers, airmen, Marines, who entrusted me with their lives and careers. Thank you all. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: On behalf of every veteran in America, I extend to you our congratulations and say those words all workers love to hear: “Thank you for a job well done.”

We're certain you will keep hiring and assisting veterans. Please tell other employers about the reliability and the work ethic of veterans. No veteran should be in need of a job, nor should veterans have to live on the streets. And those with disabilities often prove to have many abilities. Thank you, and congratulations to our award winners. (Applause)

The Chair recognizes James W. “Bill” Oxford of the National Convention Committee on Veterans Employment and Education, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
James W. Oxford, North Carolina, Chairman

Seventy-two (72) members of your Committees on Employment and Veterans’ Preference and on Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness met at 9:00am on August 28, 2016, in the Hilton, Hall of Mirrors, Third Floor, Cincinnati, Ohio, and agreed on the following report, which is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Committees were called to order by Joseph C. Sharpe Jr. (DC), Liaison Representative appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman. Davy Leghorn (DC), Assistant Director for the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, acted as temporary secretary and called the roll. A quorum being present, nominations were received: James Oxford (NC) was elected Chairman and James Fratolillo (MA) was elected Secretary of the Convention Committee.

James Fratolillo (MA) was elected Chairman of the Employment and Veterans’ Preference Committee and Dennis Tipsword (IL) was elected Secretary. Eric Measles (CA)
was elected Chairman of the Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness Committee, and James Hogan (PA), as Secretary.

A Veterans Employment & Education Resolutions screening Committee met earlier to screen and group the resolutions. A report of their actions, with recommendations, was presented to the Convention Committees for consideration.

The Screening Committee conserved the time of the Convention Committees substantially. It was chaired by James Oxford (NC), Chairman of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission and was composed of the following persons:

- James Fratolillo (MA)
- Dennis Tipsword (IL)
- James Hogan (PA)
- Eric Measles (CA)

There were 87 resolutions presented for the consideration of this Convention.

The following actions on the resolutions were taken by the Convention Committees:
- Approved or Approved w/Amendment.................................... 81
- Consolidated with Resolutions Approved............................. 5
- Referred to the Standing Commission.................................... 1
- Received and Recorded......................................................... 0
- Rejected...................................................................................... 0

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committees’ behalf.

A report of action taken on the 86 resolutions referred to the Standing National Veterans Employment & Education Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the Adjutant of the Department concerned.

**Employment and Veterans Preference Committee**

**Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment**

**Resolution No. 58: Support Legislation that Prohibits Discrimination Against Veterans in Federal Contracts**

**Origin: Utah**

**Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education**

WHEREAS, Alleviating the unemployment and underemployment of veterans is a national priority; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 11246 established requirement for non-discrimination practices in hiring and employment on the part of U.S. government contractors; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 11246 prohibits federal contractors and federally assisted construction contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment and requires them to take affirmative action on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; and

WHEREAS, This executive order specifically denies protection from discrimination for all categories of veterans on federally assisted contracts; and

WHEREAS, This executive order doesn’t call for affirmative action by federally assisted construction contractor for all categories of veterans; and

WHEREAS, The result of this executive order is that many qualified veterans have been denied employment in federal funded and federally assisted projects and contracts; and

WHEREAS, A large number of the veterans who want careers in construction have found it difficult to find employment in the construction industries; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek legislation to change Title 38 USC, Chapter 42, Section 4212 to prohibit discrimination for all categories of veterans and require contractors and
subcontractors for federally assisted projects to provide affirmative action for
veterans and require them to list their job openings with the state workforce agencies.

Resolution No. 60: Support Full Funding of Local Veterans' Employment
Representatives (LVERs) and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialist
(DVOPs) Positions

Origin: Utah
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The alleviation of unemployment and underemployment of veterans is a
national priority, and
WHEREAS, For over 40 years the Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives
(LVERs) and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist (DVOPs) have been the
cornerstone of employment services for veterans throughout the United States Employment
Service and its employment services delivery system; and
WHEREAS, The LVERs and DVOPs facilitate intensive services to job seeking
veterans in the Local Employment Service offices; and
WHEREAS, The funds made available by Congress in the past have not been
sufficient to support the appropriate number of LVERs and DVOPs needed in every state; and
WHEREAS, The LVERs and DVOPs programs have been extremely successful
assisting veterans to become employed; and
WHEREAS, A large number of the troops returning from the war on terror need
assistance in finding employment; and
WHEREAS, Sufficient funding is crucial to the delivery of employment services for
veterans in this time of war; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in
Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek
legislation for sufficient funds to support a full complement of Local Veterans’
Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist
positions.

Resolution No. 68: Support the Increased Funding of Disabled Veterans’ Outreach
Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative Programs

Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists as defined in
38 U.S.C. 4103A (a); Contain the requirements for employment by States of a sufficient
number of specialists; and
WHEREAS, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) as defined in 38
U.S.C. 4104 (a); Contain the requirements for employment by States of a sufficient number
of representatives; and
WHEREAS, Title 38 U.S.C. 4106 (a); "The Secretary shall estimate the funds
necessary for the proper and effective administration of this chapter ... include amounts
necessary in all the States for the purposes specified in paragraph (5) of Section 4102 A
(b) of this Title (see 4012A (b)(5) above); and
WHEREAS, In the above statute, it is the intent and purpose of Congress that
sufficient funds be made available to staff at least one DVOP or LVER position in each
Workforce Center nationwide; and
WHEREAS, Sufficient funding has not been made available to fully staff this program
for the past 20 years, resulting in decreased levels of services to our nation's veterans in a
time when jobs are critical to the recent influx of Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans; and
WHEREAS, There are approximately 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers operating in the United States and there are approximately 960 fewer DVOP and LVER resources than there are One-Stop Career Centers; and

WHEREAS, To ensure sufficient staff is assigned by each state, an increase of the current funds to $240,000,000.00 is required; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion continues to advocate full funding and staffing for the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service and its effective programs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that would increase funding for the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans' Employment Representative programs to the level necessary to ensure that at least one position is located in each One-Stop Career Center in the United States.

Resolution No. 69: Support the Elimination of Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service Regional Offices

Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) is one of the smallest divisions of the Department of Labor which severely limits the number of staff available to investigate Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act and veterans' preference complaints; and

WHEREAS, The President’s Management Agenda calls for elimination of the middle level of management of the federal government; and

WHEREAS, The current system of management within the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service includes regional offices who continue to increase the number of staff that do not provide direct services to veterans, conduct investigations or provide any identifiable services or products that directly benefit veterans; and

WHEREAS, This continued growth of staff in the regional offices of VETS has had a negative and adverse impact on the delivery of services to veterans seeking and needing assistance with their complaints by reducing the number of assistant directors located in the various states; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek and support legislation that will eliminate the regional offices of the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service and return the organization to its original purpose of advocating and providing direct oversight services to veterans’ programs.

Resolution No. 70: Improve Transition Assistance Program

Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

(As amended)

WHEREAS, The goal of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is to ease the adjustment of separating servicemembers during the difficult transition from active-duty into civilian life by offering job search assistance, medical/health services, the advising of available benefits, and other related counseling; and

WHEREAS, TAP pre-separation counseling was not always integrated into the Military Separation process for servicemembers, and not all military bases allowed nationally accredited service organizations to participate in the pre-separation or TAP briefings; and

WHEREAS, The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act mandated TAP participation in 2011 thanks to advocacy from The American Legion in response to
Government Accountability Reports emphasizing the need for all eligible servicemembers to attend TAP prior to discharge; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion request that the Department of Defense expand and standardize their existing pre-separation counseling policies to ensure that separating servicemembers receive information regarding federal and private sector employment opportunities, GI Bill and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs; and, be it further**

**RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to require that the Department of Labor thoroughly review the new Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for maximum effectiveness in helping servicemembers transition to civilian life and find gainful employment, while encouraging cooperation and inclusion of nationally accredited service organizations in their program; and, be it finally**

**RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to require that all TAP curricula include presentations by the Local Veterans’ Employment Staff and the local workforce center staff.**

Resolution No. 71: Oppose Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service Hiring of Non-Veterans

**Origin: Texas**

**Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education**

WHEREAS, The Department of Labor's Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) administers employment assistance and employment protection programs serving veterans, members of Armed Forces Reserve Components and eligible persons as defined in and pursuant to Chapters 41, 42 and 43 of Title 38, United States Code (USC); and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 amended 38 USC, Chapter 41 to allow for the appointment of non-veterans to positions of regional administrators, directors in the states assistant directors in the states and “other professional staff assigned to the states”; and

WHEREAS, VETS staff located in regional offices and those serving in the state routinely and extensively interact with state workforce agencies’ staffs, members of active and Reserve military components and veterans service organizations, all of whom are veteran or military affiliated; and

WHEREAS, VETS staff would be unable to fully participate in, nor have the full confidence and credibility with the veterans service organizations; and

WHEREAS, VETS staff would not have the credibility of the shared active military service or transition experience from active duty, for which VETS has the responsibility for program delivery leadership; and

WHEREAS, For more than 25 years, the VETS staff have, by Title 38, USC, Chapter 41, been required to be veterans; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion finds it inconceivable that Congress would not find “Veterans Serving Veterans” to be the most appropriate manner of delivering these critical services; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek and support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, to require Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) regional administrators, state directors, and assistant state directors and “other professional staff” under VETS to be veterans of the Armed Forces.**
Resolution No. 72: Oppose Efforts to Change the Residency Requirements for State Directors of the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The United States government has recognized that the employment of veterans is a national priority and responsibility; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Labor's Veterans’ Employment & Training Service has done a satisfactory job of promoting the employment of veterans and protecting the right of veterans to employment across the United States of America; and
WHEREAS, It is essential that each state director have a comprehensive knowledge of the state economy, veterans service organizations, including The American Legion, local service providers, and each state’s workforce agency; and
WHEREAS, Each state director must have a strong cohesive relationship with state workforce agency; therefore, in most cases the state directors are hired from the state workforce agency; and
WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code 4103 (s) (2) requires each director for Veterans’ Employment and Training for a state shall, at the time of appointment, have been a bona fide resident of the state for at least two years; and
WHEREAS, The residency requirement as stated in Title 38, United States Code, has served this nation well and has enhanced the success of all programs administered by the Veterans’ Employment and Training Services; and
WHEREAS, For many years The American Legion has been a strong supporter of keeping the residency requirement part of federal law; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion vigorously oppose any effort to change the current law that requires the residency requirement for state directors in the Department of Labor's Veterans’ Employment and Training Service.

Resolution No. 73: Oppose the Transfer of Veterans’ Employment and Training Service to the Department of Veterans Affairs

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education (Consolidated with Resolution No. 169 (IA))

WHEREAS, Throughout the nearly two hundred and thirty-eight year history of the United States, the men and women of this nation have served in the Armed Forces in the interest of the collective body of states, united under a central federal government, "to provide for the common defense"; and
WHEREAS, The men and women served the United States under the constitutional authority vested in, and by direction of, the President of the United States; and
WHEREAS, In section 3401, Title 38, United States Code (USC), Congress expressed its purpose in enacting the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA), "to encourage non-career service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantage in pursuing civilian employment and careers which can result from such service"; and
WHEREAS, It has been the finding of numerous surveys and studies that, for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of disabled veterans of the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in pursuing civilian employment and careers; and
WHEREAS, It is altogether fitting and proper that such programs of employment assistance for veterans be provided by direction of, and subject to the oversight by, Congress to ensure that all veterans/disabled veterans are afforded such services in a uniform manner following completion of their service and return to the several states; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has eliminated the requirement that the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) review all workforce centers annually and this has minimized federal oversight of the programs since the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service has drastically cut funds allocated for this activity and established a policy that only 10 percent of the centers operated under Title 38 will be reviewed; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has removed the job description of the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives from Title 38, USC, and given the states the ability to establish the duties and responsibilities; thus weakening, the VETS programs across the country by eliminating the language that required staff positions provide services only to veterans; and

WHEREAS, VETS works closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation Program to assist enrolled veterans in job search efforts throughout their rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, The present administration continues to recommend transferring VETS from DOL to VA; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Labor has expertise in job placement, job development, vocation counseling, vocational testing, job search training, and any other area of employment services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion opposes all legislative or administrative efforts to transfer the Veterans' Employment and Training Service from Department of Labor to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Resolution No. 74: Oppose any Weakening of the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Throughout the nearly two hundred and thirty-eight-year history of the United States, the men and women of this nation have served in the Armed Forces in the interest of the collective body of states, united under a central federal government, “to provide for the common defense”; and

WHEREAS, These men and women served the United States under the constitutional authority vested in, and by direction of, the President of the United States; and

WHEREAS, It has been the finding of numerous surveys and studies that, for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States are disadvantaged in pursuing civilian employment and careers, and that veterans helping veterans has proven to be extremely effective; and

WHEREAS, It is altogether fitting and proper that such programs of employment assistance for veterans be provided by direction of, and subject to oversight by, the Congress of the United States to ensure that all veterans who served the United States in uniform in time of war and peace are afforded such services in a uniform manner following completion of their service and return to the several states; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has revised Title 38 to eliminate the requirement that Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative (DVOP/LVER) staff be veterans and serve only veterans and to reduce the direction and control of such employment assistance programs while relinquishing the direction of veterans services to the discretion of the governors of the several States and/or contracting of such services to for-profit organizations; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 also eliminates the requirement that DVOP/LVER staff be assigned based on veteran intake and veteran population, and creates half-time DVOP positions, thereby eliminating positions available to serve veterans or allowing
positions to be assigned at the discretion of the individual state workforce agency, which may or may not adequately assign positions; and

WHEREAS, Such devolution of program responsibility will then be based on each state’s elected officials’ perspective and may result in either limited services or such variations in employment assistance provided to disabled veterans, while possibly making a mockery of the Congress intent found in Title 38 USC; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion will support legislation that will require Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists serve only veterans, and that the assignment of these positions to local one-stop centers be based on veteran populations; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion will support legislation that federalizes DVOP and LVER staff member positions.

Resolution No. 75: Support Legislation that Ensures that all Agencies that Receive Funding from the U. S. Department of Labor or the Workforce Investment Act Meet the Mandatory Compliance Standards for Veterans’ Preference

Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service Centers must meet mandatory compliance standards for veterans' preference; and

WHEREAS, The Job Service Centers for each state and territory receive funding under the Wagner–Peyser Act of 1933 and are eligible for special grants to provide services to veterans; and

WHEREAS, The January 2009 mandate, authorized by changes in law stating, “any Department of Labor workforce development, job training, or placement programs must provide priority to veterans,” is not being met at all career one-stop locations; and

WHEREAS, The President instituted a veterans’ “Gold Card” initiative to further reinforce priority service for veterans at DOL career one-stops; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, That The American Legion urge Congress to ensure that all agencies that are provided funds from the Department of Labor, or that receive funding under the Wagner-Peyser Act, or Workforce Investment Act meet the same compliance standards as the state workforce agencies relative to veterans’ preference, as mandated by current law; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That these same agencies be required to provide compliance reports to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Veterans' Employment and Training Service or their designee to ensure this mandate is carried out.

Resolution No. 76: Support Improvements in the Reporting Programs Available to and Administered by Veterans’ Employment and Training Service

Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) is an agency within the Department of Labor (DOL) dedicated to providing America’s veterans with quality employment and training services; and

WHEREAS, The Assistant Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training (ASVET) is responsible for ensuring that the agency continues to meet its mission; and

WHEREAS, The ASVET is committed to taking aggressive actions to improve the quality, timeliness, and accessibility to veterans’ employment and training services within every state; and
WHEREAS, VETS programs must meet the needs of veterans facing employment barriers; and
WHEREAS, Members of The American Legion continue to work closely with Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs) and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist (DVOPs) in local communities across the country; and
WHEREAS, Although Title 38, United States Code, identifies duties and responsibilities of LVERs and DVOPs, the ASVET cannot accurately capture necessary local, state and national data to adequately assess performance outcomes or hold the various states accountable for providing priority services to veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly support improvements in the reporting programs available to and administered by Veterans’ Employment and Training Service; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion petition Congress to enact legislation that will require the Assistant Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training Service to initiate and implement a real-time data collection system, which would allow the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service to properly measure performance at the local, state, and national level.

Resolution No. 77: Support for the Military Transition Program

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, In 1992, Congress enacted the Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act (SMOCTA) which became Public Law 102-484; and
WHEREAS, SMOCTA is a transition tool designed to provide job training and employment to certain veterans discharged from the military after August 1, 1990; and
WHEREAS, The SMOCTA program provides financial incentives to employers who hire and provide training to eligible veterans; and
WHEREAS, To be eligible for participation in the SMOCTA program, the veteran must meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) have a primary or secondary military occupational specialty that the Department of Defense has determined is not readily transferable to the civilian work force; or (2) be entitled to compensation (or would be entitled to compensation but for the receipt of military retired pay) for a Department of Veterans Affairs service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more; or (3) be unemployed and have been unemployed for at least eight (8) of the last 15 work weeks before filing an application; and
WHEREAS, The veterans eligible for job training under SMOCTA are precisely those individuals who need the most assistance in making a successful transition to the civilian work force; and
WHEREAS, The Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and Labor (DOL) signed a Memorandum of Understand (MOU) in March of 1993, which defined their roles and responsibilities in the implementation of SMOCTA; and
WHEREAS, DOD provided funding for SMOCTA while the VA and DOL were responsible for administering the program; and
WHEREAS, Under the terms of the MOU, the SMOCTA program will terminate when all the funds provided by DOD are expended or at such time as agreed upon by all parties; and
WHEREAS, This country’s unemployment problem is being exacerbated by the drastic downsizing of the military; and
WHEREAS, The Military Transition Program can help to alleviate the employment problems faced by many veterans who are being separated from the military; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek continuation of the Military Transition Program until the employment picture improves and the downsizing of the military is completed; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek adequate funding for the Military Transition Program so that it can achieve what it is designed to do.

Resolution No. 78: Support for the Strengthening and Adequate Funding of the National Veterans’ Training Institute
Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, Since February 2001, the United States has been involved in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan where America’s best Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have been sent to this region to serve their country in this time of need; and
WHEREAS, The Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOPs) Specialists and Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs) assigned to all fifty states and the territories of the United States utilize a centralized training center in Denver, Colorado, on the site of the University of Colorado, for training from one uniform format; and
WHEREAS, Congress is scrutinizing the National Veterans’ Training Institute (NVTI) due to budget constraints and NVTI has served many of the country’s most professional DVOPs and LVERs for several years; and
WHEREAS, NVTI continues to be a source of information and additional training for the DVOPs and LVERs of this great nation; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to continue funding the National Veterans’ Training Institute, and its continuation of uniform training for these veteran employment professionals as provided by this institution.

Resolution No. 79: Support the Restoration of the Duties and Responsibilities of the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative
Origin: Texas
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, Throughout the nearly two hundred and thirty-eight year history of the United States, the men and women of this nation have served in the armed forces in the interest of the collective body of states, united under a central federal government, "to provide for the common defense"; and
WHEREAS, These men and women served the United States under the constitutional authority vested in, and by direction of the President of the United States; and
WHEREAS, In section 4301, Title 38, United States Code (USC), Congress expressed its purpose in enacting the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA), "to encourage non-career service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantage to civilian careers and employment which can result from such service"; and
WHEREAS, It has been the finding of numerous surveys and studies that, for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of veterans of the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in pursuing civilian employment and careers; and
WHEREAS, A recent Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General report has recommended that Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) increase its oversight of this program, which confirms that services for veterans be provided by direction of, and subject to oversight by Congress to ensure that all veterans/disabled
veterans are afforded such services in a uniform manner following completion of their service and return to the several states; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has eliminated the requirement that DOL-VETS review all workforce centers annually and this has minimized federal oversight of the programs since the ASVET has drastically cut funds allocated for this activity and established a policy that only 10 percent of the centers operated under Title 38 will be reviewed; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has removed the job descriptions of the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOPs) Specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) from Title 38, USC, and given the states the ability to establish the duties and responsibilities; thus, weakening the VETS programs across the country by eliminating the language that required these staff positions provide services only to veterans; and

WHEREAS, The passage of Public Law 107-288 also removed the federally mandated manning formulas for assigning DVOPs and LVERs -- this has allowed each state to determine the number of veterans’ employment personnel in each state, and the assignment of more than one half-time DVOP and/or LVER to one office, while eliminating positions in offices that need veterans’ staff by virtue of veteran intake; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation that will restore language to Chapter 41, Title 38 that will require that veteran staff serve only veterans, require that half-time Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives positions be assigned only after approval of the Director for Veterans' Employment and Training Service, and that the Secretary of Labor be required to monitor all career centers that have veteran staff assigned; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion also support legislation that restores the duties and responsibilities of the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports Department of Labor’s Assistant Secretary for Veterans’ Employment and Training Service being required to review all Department of Labor employment and training programs in order to ensure that all programs provide priority services to veterans.

Resolution No. 80: Support Legislation that Would Return Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative Funding to a Staffing Grant

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Veterans’ preference and priority of service for veterans have been earned by the sacrifices of men and women who have served in the military and protected our inalienable rights and nation; and

WHEREAS, Title 38, United States Code, changed the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative (LVER) grants from staffing grants to performance grants; and

WHEREAS, Many states have decreased the actual staff to provide services to veterans and provide veterans’ preference by 50 percent or more; and

WHEREAS, Currently, there is legislation before Congress that seeks to overhaul how all Department of Labor one-stops and veterans’ priority programs, including DVOPs/LVERs, are financed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
support legislation that would return Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative (LVER) funding to a staffing grant; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That we support action that would require the Congress through the Secretary of Labor to ensure that each workforce center in the various states offering labor exchange services have sufficient funding to provide at least one DVOP/LVER staff to provide services to all veterans requiring employment and training assistance residing within the state; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion petition Congress to enact legislation that prevents any efforts or attempts by the Department of Labor to make any changes in allocations that could potentially cut or divert funding for veterans’ employment programs and services, and mandate that the Department of Labor request full funding for these programs.

Resolution No. 81: Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops for National Guard and Reserve Members

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Public Law 101-510, codified in sections 1141-1150 of Title 10, United State Code, authorized comprehensive transition assistance benefits and services for separating servicemembers and their spouses and required that Transition Assistance Program (TAP) employment workshops be established and maintained; and

WHEREAS, TAP employment workshops are mandatory for all servicemembers prior to separating from active-duty; and

WHEREAS, The new and improved TAP curriculum includes additional career-specific capstone courses in (1) an Education track, (2) a Technical and Skills Training track; and (3) an Entrepreneurship track; and

WHEREAS, Many of the forces engaged in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn are members of the National Guard and Reserves; and

WHEREAS, Members of the National Guard and Reserves are not afforded the opportunity to attend a TAP employment workshop prior to separation from active-duty; and

WHEREAS, Members of the National Guard and Reserves must take time away from their civilian jobs and travel to an active-duty site at their own expense to attend a TAP employment workshop on a space-available basis; and

WHEREAS, It is altogether fitting and proper that such programs of employment assistance for National Guard and Reserves members be provided at no expense to them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that will provide every member of the Armed Forces (including those in the National Guard and Reserves) who are activated for 12 months or longer, an adequate amount of time to attend the Transition Assistance Program workshop in entirety, within ninety days of separation.

Resolution No. 149: Support “Buy American” Policy at the Department of Veterans Affairs to Create Jobs and Opportunities for Veterans

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

(As amended)

WHEREAS, To reverse the devastating impact to the economic security of veterans is to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to foster job creation for
veterans, through the 3 million veteran small businesses, by adopting and enforcing a “Buy American” policy under the Veterans First Contracting Program at the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, The rates and statistics of critical veteran social issues have been accelerated to higher numbers by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Yet the establishment of acquisition policies fails to establish preference for the more than 3 million American-based veteran small businesses and instead VA continues to divert a larger share of their annual budget to contracts with large businesses who sell products from overseas manufacturers, even when same or similar “Made in the United States” products are available at same or lower pricing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support any legislation that mandates that the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs adopt and enforce a “Buy American” policy under the Veterans First Contracting Program at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Resolution No. 150: Expanding Post-9/11 GI Bill for Entrepreneurship
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education (As amended)

WHEREAS, Our nation’s economy is comprised of a majority of small businesses; and

WHEREAS, Our men and women returning home from military service certainly have entrepreneurial skills; and

WHEREAS, Many small businesses struggle in their first years of start-up and can utilize assistance in getting established; and

WHEREAS, Returning veterans are eligible for the GI Bill for education benefits, which are designed to give the veteran assistance toward obtaining an education; and

WHEREAS, The GI Bill could be expanded to encourage veterans to establish their own businesses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation and/or administrative proposal to allow servicemembers and veterans who are eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill to use those educational benefits to start, expand, or pursue federal contracting and be afforded the opportunity to use those benefits at institutions of higher learning or small business developing centers; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation and/or administrative proposal for these business programs to be approved by either the State Approving Agencies, Small Business Administration and/or Department of Education to ensure quality of the program; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to allow veterans who are eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to convert those benefits into assistance in starting a business, purchasing a business or expanding a business.

Resolution No. 151: Status of Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business after the Death of the Veteran Owner
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Public Law No. 109-461 passed in December 2006 created additional benefits for surviving spouses who inherit service-disabled veteran-owned businesses; and
WHEREAS, The intent of the law was to ensure that a business owned by a veteran that received contracts based on the service-disabled veteran-owned business status did not suffer because the veteran died; and

WHEREAS, Spouses are able to retain the service-disabled veteran-owned business status for up to 10 years if the veteran owned at least 51 percent of the company before their death; and

WHEREAS, The law passed in December 2006 only took into account the veteran who returned disabled; consequently, it left a large gap in those service members who owned businesses who were killed in the line of duty; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 109-461, in its treatment of businesses after death of veteran-owner, neglected to take into account Reservists and National Guard members who owned businesses before their activation; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 109-461 only transfers service-disabled veteran-owned business status to the surviving spouse of a veteran who acquires ownership rights in a small business if the death of a veteran causes a small business to be less that 51 percent-owned by one or more veterans; and

WHEREAS, The transfer of status in the period beginning on the date on which the veteran dies, only applies to a surviving spouse of a veteran with a service-connected disability rated as 100 percent disabling or a surviving spouse of a veteran who dies as a result of a service-connected disability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support amending Public Law 109-461 to read that if any disabled veteran who owns a certified service-disabled veteran-owned business dies, (regardless of his/her disability at the time), their business inherited by their spouse/dependent will retain the service-disabled veteran-owned business status in conjunction with Public Law 109-461; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports that if any servicemember, to include those who were mobilized in the National Guard or Reserve, is killed in action and owns at least 51 percent of a business prior to his/her death, the business bequeathed to their spouses/dependents must be granted service-disabled veteran-owned business status for reason of preference in federal contracts; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports any administrative or legislative effort that will improve and increase the benefits bequeathed to the veteran’s spouses or dependents upon a veteran business owner’s death.

Resolution No. 152: Affirm Support for Emerging-Internet-Based and Peer-Financed Alternative Capital Options for Veteran-Owned Small Businesses

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, There is increasing demand among veterans for assistance in funding veteran-owned small businesses; and

WHEREAS, Access to capital and credit is critical and difficult for veteran-owned small businesses; and

WHEREAS, The greater the number of capital and credit options available to veterans, the more likely a veteran-owned small business will succeed; and

WHEREAS, Younger veterans, in particular, are increasingly using non-bank internet-based and peer-financed funding sources for their projects and businesses; and

WHEREAS, Successful veteran-owned small businesses are good for the economy in the local community, state, and nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports initiatives and organizations that advance emerging internet-based and
peer-financed alternative capital options that focus on funding veteran-owned small businesses.

Resolution No. 153: Support Effort of the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Office of Veterans Business Development
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Assistance to veterans who have honorably served our country is a veterans benefit that dates back to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944; and

WHEREAS, Benefits to veterans have always included assistance in creating and operating veteran-owned small businesses; and

WHEREAS, The military is currently in the process of downsizing, which will mean that thousands of former military personnel who have honorably served their country will be unemployed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports increased funding for the efforts of the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Office of Veterans Business Development in its initiatives to provide enhanced outreach and specific community-based assistance to veterans and self-employed members of the Reserve and National Guard; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation that would permit the SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development to enter into contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements to further its outreach goals and develop a nationwide community-based service delivery system specifically for veterans and members of Reserve Components of the United States military.

Resolution No. 154: Support Reasonable Set-Aside of Federal Procurements and Contracts for Businesses Owned and Operated by Veterans
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Government small business assistance for all honorably discharged veterans dates back to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944; and

WHEREAS, Veterans have provided selfless military service to America and previous generations of veterans have achieved significant self-employed small business success in America; and

WHEREAS, Present policies and legislation ensure that not all veterans receive the same opportunity to prosper as small business owners, undermining their opportunity to succeed as part of the Department of Defense or government’s supplier base that is central to ensuring America’s success in the War on Terrorism, and America’s success in the international economic systems; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion will support development and passage of federal, state and local veteran business development legislation to provide assistance to all veterans, including disabled veterans and members of Reserve Components of the United States military to ensure equal opportunity for veterans to start or grow a small business, including establishing numerical goals for all veterans to compete in government procurement; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to ensure equal parity for all veterans in all small business government contracting programs, thus ensuring no veteran procurement program is at a disadvantage in competing with any other government procurement program established by law.
Resolution No. 155: Support Verification Improvements for Veterans’ Business
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DOD) is the nation’s largest purchaser or goods and services; and
WHEREAS, DOD rarely meets their service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) contracting goal as set by the Small Business Administration; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is authorized under the Veterans First program to enter into contracts first with SDVOSBs and then with veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs); and
WHEREAS, Congress has made findings that VA has entered into contracts pursuant to the Veterans First Contracting Program with companies that were not legitimate SDVOSBs or VOSBs; and
WHEREAS, Pursuant to recent legislation, VA has implemented a formal verification process which companies must undergo prior to being found eligible to participate in the Veterans First Contracting Program; and
WHEREAS, VA has not created a formal appeals process for those small business owners who have been denied VA verification; and
WHEREAS, The VA lacks expertise in determining control and ownership requirements in small businesses; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion applauds the VA’s attempt to ensure every small business verified is in fact eligible to be a SDVOSB; however, the process has become too cumbersome to navigate for many legitimate veteran small business owners; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion recommend the streamlining and improvement of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) verification of Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses and Veteran-Owned Small Businesses interested in participating in the Agency’s Veterans First Contracting Program; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion endorses VA’s efforts to ensure that contracts awarded pursuant to the Veterans First Contracting Program are awarded to companies that truly are entitled to receive these contracting benefits; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion endorses efforts to create a formal appeals process for contesting an initial denial decision; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that calls for the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration to share responsibilities for the verification of service-disabled veteran-owned businesses and veteran-owned small businesses, and this responsibility should be divided accordingly to each agency’s expertise and record of past performance; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion endorses the implementation of a program comparable to Veterans First Contracting Program within the Department of Defense.

Resolution No. 156: Veterans Entrepreneur Training Program
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, In 1989, The American Legion Department of Utah received a grant for $91,447.00 from the Small Business Administration (SBA) to be used to fund
entrepreneurial training for veterans desiring to implement and own a small business venture; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion program was designed to encourage and motivate veterans to explore their management and organizing abilities required in formulating sound business plans and help in obtaining needed financing for successful implementation of a business; and

WHEREAS, Cooperation with The American Legion and SBA with local entities that entail schools with Small Business Development Centers, Chambers of Commerce, business owners, State Industrial Development Departments, private consulting support systems, lending institutions, and instruction and information from existing and retired business owners can contribute to The American Legion programs following three fold objectives:

1. To reach out to as many veterans as possible to explore their business interests;
2. To select a reasonable number of veterans to participate based on entrepreneurial potential and application of business successful criteria;
3. To provide selected veterans with education programs, support workshops and counseling to assist in forming sound business plans; and

WHEREAS, Classes should be held at educational establishments during evening or weekend hours and should include the veteran entrepreneur's spouse or partner whenever possible having proved to be an unequivocal asset to the veteran's success; and

WHEREAS, Due to older age individuals separating from active military, plus activation of National Guard and Reserve units who have immediate family obligations that interrupt a service member's business or employment while deployed can completely change their future professions when returning could necessitate a training program to fit their changed needs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion request the Small Business Administration and Congress make funding available to reinstate the Veterans Entrepreneur Training Program grants to help those who are in need to return to productive civilian professions.

Resolution No. 170: Oppose the Department of Labor's Restructuring of Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative Roles

Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education (Consolidated with Resolution No. 61 (UT) and Resolution No. 67 (TX))

WHEREAS, Congress has long recognized that America has a special obligation to help veterans find employment, and that “veterans bring a unique combination of skill, discipline, character, and talent to the marketplace,” and accordingly, Congress has created special resources for veterans; and

WHEREAS, In April 2014, the Department of Labor issued a directive that deprives many veterans of valuable job-search and worker training assistance that Congress intended by the enactment of Title 38 Ch. 4103 and 4104; and

WHEREAS, The original GI Bill of 1944 created a system of grants for states to hire Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs), “persons who would become expert in the placement of veterans needing jobs,” and from the start, LVERs reached out to “employers with jobs suitable for… veterans” and “assisted veterans looking for work”; and

WHEREAS, In 1977, in response to the high unemployment rate among Vietnam veterans, especially disabled veterans, the Department of Labor created the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist, which provided special employment services for disabled veterans, and in 1980, Congress made the program permanent; and
WHEREAS, From the start, DVOPs were instructed to provide services to any veteran, “with the following priority in the provision of services: (1) special disabled veterans, (2) other disabled veterans, and (3) other eligible veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary”; and

WHEREAS, On April 10, 2014, the Department of Labor issued a guidance letter that limited what functions LVERs could perform and whom DVOPs could assist, contrary to decades of practice and the text of the statutes Congress passed; the result is that some veterans will no longer be allowed to see a veteran specialist for assistance; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek legislation that will preserve the integrity, intent and purpose of Title 38, Chapters 41, 42, and 43 by prohibiting the Department of Labor efforts in implementing Training and Guidance Letter 19-13 or other directives that restricts or forbids services to veterans by Local Veterans' Employment Representatives or Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists.

Resolution No. 274: Support Employment Services for Spouses of Servicemembers Killed in the Line of Duty
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization for veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported strong programs to assist veterans, disabled veterans and the spouses of veterans in obtaining assistance in finding employment; and

WHEREAS, Under federal civil service guidelines certain veterans are given either five or ten point preference in federal hiring and this preference passes on to the surviving spouse if the veteran dies while on active-duty and their service was under honorable conditions; and

WHEREAS, The Jobs of Veterans Act (Public Law 107–288) established job counseling, training and placement services for veterans and certain spouses; and

WHEREAS, Under this act it narrowly defined a spouse (Title 38, Chapter 41, Section 4101 definitions) as 1) the spouse of any veteran who died of a service-connected disability, or 2) listed by the Secretary concerned as missing in action, or 3) captured in line of duty for a hostile force, or 4) forcibly detained or interned in line of duty by a foreign government or power; and

WHEREAS, This public law completely left out the spouses of those veterans "killed in the line of duty" causing a great injustice to this group; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to amend Title 38, Chapter 41, Section 4101 definitions to include spouses of servicemen and women who were killed in the line of duty.

Resolution No. 305: Support the Development of Veterans On-The-Job Training Opportunities
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, In years past there have been special employment initiatives for employment of veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act (SMOCTA) was one, and the other was the Veterans’ Job Training Act (VJTA); and
WHEREAS, These programs were designed to provide financial incentives for employers to hire certain categories of veterans; and
WHEREAS, These were highly successful programs because employers were able to defray some costs associated with training eligible veterans; and
WHEREAS, There have been numerous changes to GI Bill benefits making it easier for veterans to obtain higher education and even a license or certification; and
WHEREAS, GI Bill benefits can be a useful tool to help employers defray the costs of training veterans by developing an on-the-job training program thereby benefiting both the veteran and employer; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the development and implementation of on-the-job (OJT) training programs for eligible veterans in the public and private sectors; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support the development of joint projects to enhance OJT opportunities for eligible veterans through any GI Bill benefit.

Resolution No. 306: Allow Military Retirees to Apply for Position in Federal Law Enforcement After Age 37
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, Public Law 101-509 makes it mandatory for all federal law enforcement position personnel to retire by age 57 requiring an applicant to be no older than 37 when applying, thus allowing them to complete 20 years of service before age 57; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense spends in excess of $15 billion annually to train men and women of the Armed Forces with thousands of career personnel who complete their initial 20 years for retirement of which a large number have reached the age of 38-40 at time of separation; and
WHEREAS, Under existing law it is impossible for a 20 year military retiree to obtain a career in federal law enforcement because of age restriction even though they are more than qualified for federal employment with their job expertise, security clearance credentials, allegiance to their country, etc.; and
WHEREAS, Providing opportunities for transitional career military personnel is a reinvestment in defense training that would help preserve scarce recruiting and training funds while providing a stable source of manpower to help fulfill the federal government’s 188,000 law enforcement personnel requirements; and
WHEREAS, Removing the age restriction or at least providing a waiver based on military service would complement the American taxpayer who has fully funded the training and experience of our career military by utilizing their expertise for federal law enforcement position; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion petition the Congress to amend Public Law 101-509 that makes it impossible for our retiring military men and women to pursue post-military careers in federal law enforcement based solely on age; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That age waivers or other means are adopted to accommodate those who have served honorably allowing them to continue to serve in a profession that would be enhanced by their previous experiences.
Resolution No. 307: Support Legislation to Amend Title 38 United States Code, to Prohibit Discrimination and Acts of Reprisal by Employers Against Veterans that Seek Treatment for their Service-Connected Disabilities

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, This great organization was based upon comradeship born of wartime service and dedicated to fair and equitable treatment of all veterans; and
WHEREAS, Many of this nation’s men and women have answered the call to serve in the United States Armed Forces; and
WHEREAS, Congress, through the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), provides protection from employment discrimination for men and women who perform military duty; and
WHEREAS, USERRA requires that employers release any employees to perform military duty; and
WHEREAS, Many of the men and women serving in the United States Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard as well as activated National Guard and Reserves) sustained service-connected disabilities; and
WHEREAS, Under USERRA, employers are required to “make reasonable efforts to accommodate a person’s disability so that the person can perform the position that would have held if the person had remained continuously employed”; and
WHEREAS, The employers, however, are not specifically required by law to allow veterans with service-connected disabilities to be absent from the workplace to receive the necessary medical treatment for these disabilities; and
WHEREAS, The necessary medical care can be provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at the VA Medical Centers as well as a private provider for service-connected veterans; and
WHEREAS, Legislation has been introduced that would amend Title 38, United States Code to prohibit discrimination and acts of reprisal against persons who receive treatment for illnesses, injuries, and disabilities incurred in or aggravated by service in the uniformed services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, to prohibit discrimination and acts of reprisals by employers against veterans that seek treatment for their service-connected disabilities.

Resolution No. 309: Supporting the U. S. Economy and Increase U. S. Energy Security Through a Canadian-American Pipeline

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion, the nation’s largest veterans service organization, is a strong advocate for programs and policies that enhance our nation’s economic strength, and national security, and opportunities for veterans and all citizens; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion’s sense of obligation to community, state and nation drives honest advocacy for veterans in Washington; and
WHEREAS, The strength of our nation’s economy relates directly to the economic opportunity available to veterans of the United States Armed Forces and all other citizens; and
WHEREAS, The proposed pipeline will increase our nation’s energy security by delivering 700,000 barrels per day of North American Crude oil to our nation’s refineries; and
WHEREAS, The construction of the currently proposed pipeline to transport oil from the oil fields in Canada and the American upper Midwest to the American refineries in the
Gulf Coast will strengthen the economy and make the United States the second largest oil producer in the world; and

WHEREAS, This added stability will stimulate annual gains in American business activity including the immediate creation of 20,000 jobs and an expected additional 118,000 jobs in adjacent industries; and

WHEREAS, The pipeline will reduce the United States’ dependency on foreign oil and prevent the future need to deploy American citizens to respond to potential disruption involving foreign conflicts, piracy or other unforeseen risks; and

WHEREAS, The Canadian oversupply of oil has been severely discounted as result of the current Administration’s rejection of the permit for the XL Pipeline; and

WHEREAS, Canada resorted to courting China to invest in their oil reserve thereby giving China a large stake in North American oil supply; and

WHEREAS, America’s veterans, who have been hit hard by the Great Recession and its aftermath, will benefit significantly from these economic gains; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion, in order to increase American energy self-sufficiency, promote the creation of 20,000 jobs, and improve the stability of the American economy, strongly recommend the permitting, construction and operation of the pipeline; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges all segments of the U.S. government pursue and grant all required permits necessary for the construction of the proposed pipeline without further delay.

Resolution No. 310: Support the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of wartime veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state, and nation; and

WHEREAS, Annually, the Department of Defense discharges approximately 250,000 servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, Many transitioning servicemembers and veterans are not aware of relevant entrepreneurship opportunities available to them; and

WHEREAS, The Coalition for Veteran Owned Business is a collaborative platform that supports veteran small business owners and hosts events for transitioning servicemembers, veterans and spouses; and

WHEREAS, Through the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business, large and small businesses are connecting with veteran-owned small businesses through their supplier diversity programs and committed to paying small business contractors on time; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion intends to collaborate with the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business through co-hosting industry events and providing on-going outreach for the purpose of offering entrepreneurship counseling, training or other services for servicemembers, veterans and their spouses.
Resolution No. 311: Federal and State Incentive for Employees to use Veterans’ Preference
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 323 (Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education))

WHEREAS, America’s men and women returning home from military service are encountering financial challenges, which include a weakened economy, high unemployment, and a lack of affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, Many companies are receiving state and federal grants, tax credits and subsidies to build their businesses; and

WHEREAS, There must be more incentives for companies to hire veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation that would give state or federal grants, tax credits and/or subsidies to employers who utilize veterans’ preference within their hiring practices.

Resolution No. 315: Support Employment and Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservist Returning from Deployment
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Over seven years of war has caused record high deployment rates of citizen soldiers, who have the responsibility of maintaining civilian employment while waiting for the call to serve their country; and

WHEREAS, Many of these soldiers, who struggle daily to balance their dual military and civilian lives, have returned home from deployment to find that same contract of balance was not upheld by their employers; and

WHEREAS, According to the Department of Defense’s Status of Forces study released in November 2007, among post-9/11 returning Reservists and National Guard, nearly 11,000 were denied prompt reemployment and more than 20,000 lost seniority, pay, and other benefits awarded to them through their dedicated service; and

WHEREAS, It was the intent of Congress in enacting the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 that no veteran be denied employment, reemployment, advancement or discrimination in employment for serving their country in the interest of protecting our nation; and

WHEREAS, As currently drafted, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 fails to adequately support military personnel upon their return to civilian employment as countless employers have violated the rules laid out in Title 38 of the United States Code; and

WHEREAS, Legislation is under consideration that will help ensure that service members and veterans are promptly reinstated in their civilian jobs when they return from tours abroad; and

WHEREAS, This legislation would strengthen the protections in current law to ensure that service members’ and veterans’ employment and reemployment rights are effectively enforced under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports and urges Congress to adopt and enforce the provisions as outlined in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA); and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports the amending and strengthening of USERRA to ensure that National Guard and Reservists receive the employment and reemployment rights afforded to them through their dedicated service to the country and as required under law.

Resolution No. 316: Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, America’s men and women returning home from military service are encountering financial challenges, which include a weakened economy, higher than average unemployment rate, and a lack of affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. government has recognized that employment of veterans is a national responsibility and that alleviating unemployment or underemployment of honorably discharged veterans is a national policy; and

WHEREAS, Unemployment rates of individuals recently separated from the Armed Forces is high and unacceptable; and

WHEREAS, Many companies are receiving federal and state grants, tax credits and subsidies to build their businesses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislative and administrative measures that seek to encourage and recognize organizations that hire veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion reminds employers, both public and private sectors, of their moral obligation to hire veterans.

Resolution No. 317: Enforcing Veterans’ Preference Hiring Practices in Federal Civil Service
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Congress of the United States has passed legislation giving veterans who are disabled or who serve on active-duty in the Armed Forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over non-veterans both in federal hiring practices and in retention during reductions in force; and

WHEREAS, Federal agencies are required to provide a fool-proof way for applicants to state their veterans’ preference and human resource personnel and hiring managers are required to consistently and accurately apply veterans’ preference in hiring but fail to do so on one or both counts; and

WHEREAS, Manual application processes and hiring practices, along with the lack of accountability for recruitment outreach to the veteran community are no longer acceptable in the federal sector and have proven to be ineffective and used as a way around veterans’ preference; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion restate its commitment to ensure that veterans' preference is consistently and accurately applied in federal civilian recruitment, application and hiring; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion monitor the hiring and recruitment practices of federal agencies when it has been brought to our attention that veterans applications and candidacy are not being fairly handled by the agency; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek and support any legislative or administrative proposal that will mandate the use of automated recruitment, hiring
and retention system that safeguard against hiring malpractice in the application and the hiring process.

Resolution No. 319: Expanding Veterans Employment and Homeless Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, It has been the finding of numerous Government Accountability Office reports that, for a variety of reasons, the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program has not been adequately administered by the Department of Labor; and

WHEREAS, The issue of veterans unemployment remains a non-priority to the Secretary of Labor whose priorities lie with the overall employment of the general population and other minority groups; and

WHEREAS, It is necessary that such program for veterans be fully funded and subject to complete oversight by the congressional veterans affairs committees to ensure that all veterans are administered services in a uniform manner, and that the priority of service is preserved; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 107-288 has severely crippled the Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service’s (DOL-VETS) ability to maintain oversight and control of the JVSG program; and

WHEREAS, The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program within DOL-VETS funding has been flat lined at $38 million for several years – authorized at $50 million; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) homeless veterans programs have proved to be successful in rehabilitation of the veteran in assisting him/her to become a productive citizen; and

WHEREAS, The VA has begun to invest in more employment services for veterans and is gaining critical knowledge in administering employment services to veterans; and

WHEREAS, The VA is exempt from sequestration, has the singular focus of administering services to veterans and has one singular priority – the well-being of the veteran community; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Labor has expertise in job placement, job development, vocational counseling, vocational testing, job search training, and any other area of employment services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation that calls for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the state workforce agencies to share responsibilities for all Title 38 veterans employment services; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That VA be fully funded to administer the Job for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), establish standards and collect performance data, and the state workforce agencies administer the programs and report directly to VA; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That there would be sufficient funding to allow one Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans’ Employment Representative for each fully functioning workforce center; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Labor programs continue to provide priority services to veterans and that JVSG staff remain in the workforce centers.
Resolution No. 320: Support for Expansion of Oil Refineries
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, Employment in America at the present time is rather dismal; and
WHEREAS, There are existing oil refineries in both the states of Montana and North Dakota; and
WHEREAS, These refineries could be expanded to help meet the energy needs of our country; and
WHEREAS, Pipelines from Canada could be directed to these expanded refineries; and
WHEREAS, With the expanded output from these refineries, the finished products could serve the Northern Tier of our country where the energy needs are the greatest; and
WHEREAS, The expanded refineries would require more people to man these facilities with permanent employment; and
WHEREAS, These expanded refineries would increase energy production and reduce unemployment; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion sponsor and support legislation that expands these refineries and elevates the issue of building the pipelines to an issue of high national priority; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That both of these actions would improve the employment situation and also help to supply more energy for America.

Resolution No. 334: Support Legislation to Increase Telework (Telecommuting) Opportunities for Service-Disabled Veterans and Military Spouses
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, U.S. veterans must have the opportunity to assure their own financial security and that of their families; and
WHEREAS, The option to telecommute (to work from home or another off-site location) is critical to achieving financial security for service-disabled veterans who cannot commute or work at a traditional worksite every day because of their disabilities; and
WHEREAS, The option to hire telecommuters is critical to achieving financial security for veteran entrepreneurs whose service-connected disabilities compel them to run their businesses from home and who do not have enough space at home to employ on-site staff; and
WHEREAS, The option to telecommute is critical for spouses of service-disabled veterans who need workplace flexibility to manage both care-giving and job responsibilities; and
WHEREAS, The option to telecommute is critical for spouses of servicemembers on active-duty who need telework to prevent repeated unemployment as they move with their servicemembers from base to base; and
WHEREAS, Some states maintain a tax rule commonly referred to as the “convenience of the employer” rule; and
WHEREAS, A state that applies this rule forces nonresidents who choose to telecommute some or most of the time to an in-state employer to pay taxes, not just on the part of their income they earn when they work in the state, but also on the part they earn at home, in a different state; and
WHEREAS, Many telecommuters are double taxed under this rule, because they must pay taxes to their employer’s state on the wages they earn at home even though their home state can tax the same wages; and
WHEREAS, Even telecommuters who live in states with no income tax (and who are, therefore, not double taxed) are still penalized as a result of the rule, because,
notwithstanding the fact that they chose to live in an income-tax free state, and
notwithstanding the fact that they may pay uncommonly high sales tax or other taxes in
their home state, they must still pay income tax, to their employer’s state instead of their
own, on the wages they earn at home; and
WHEREAS, The telework tax penalty imposed by the convenience of the employer
rule can eliminate the option of telecommuting for service-disabled veterans and military
spouses by making the determination about where they owe taxes unduly complex and
confusing; and
WHEREAS, The telework tax penalty can eliminate the option of telecommuting for
service-disabled veterans and military spouses by making telework unaffordable; and
WHEREAS, The telework tax penalty reduces the number of telework positions
available to service-disabled veterans and military spouses by creating undue complexity
and confusion for small businesses regarding where they must withhold for interstate
telecommuters, driving up compliance costs, and, as a result, making telework
prohibitively expensive for these businesses; and
WHEREAS, The telework tax penalty drives up compliance costs for service-disabled
veterans who own home-based businesses, making it prohibitively expensive for them to
hire the off-site workers they need; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in
Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
strongly support federal legislation that would eliminate a steep tax barrier to
telework and increase telework opportunities by prohibiting states from taxing the
compensation that nonresident individuals earn when they are physically present
outside the state and from applying a “convenience of the employer” rule or any
similar rule.

Resolution No. 336: Support Legislation that Would Change the 12-Year Delimiting
Date for Eligibility to Chapter 31 Benefits (VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and
Employment Program)
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, The period of eligibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) benefits is 12 years from the date of
separation from the military or the date the veteran was first notified by VA of a service-
connected disability rating; and
WHEREAS, Many veterans do not understand their eligibility to VR&E services and
the benefits of the program until later in life when they become so disabled that their
disabilities create an employment barrier; and
WHEREAS, VR&E lacks quality performance measures that measure rehabilitation
based on the long-term effects of disability and the likelihood that a disability may require
further rehabilitation; and
WHEREAS, VR&E can take more than 90 days from enrollment to the start of
services; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in
Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge
Congress to change the eligibility delimiting date for the Department of Veterans
Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program by
eliminating the 12-year delimiting date for eligibility to Chapter 31 benefits and allow
all veterans with employment impediments or problems with independent living to
qualify for VR&E services for life; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That the VA must restructure performance measures to emphasize
long-term rehabilitation versus the current short-term indicators of success; and, be it
further
RESOLVED, That VR&E should continually follow up with veterans considered to be rehabilitated to ensure that the rehabilitation and employment placement plans have been successful; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That VA streamlines eligibility and entitlement to VR&E programs to provide more timely intervention and assistance to all disabled veterans.

Resolution No. 339: Support the Rollover of IRA Account Penalty of Tax Liability of a Permanent and Total 100 Percent Service-Disabled Veteran with Individual Unemployability

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of honorably discharged veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state, and nation; and
WHEREAS, The United States government has recognized responsibility to its honorably discharged veterans and that alleviating tax burdens for them should be a priority; and
WHEREAS, Pursuant to the bylaws of this organization it is deemed desirable and in the best interest of its members that action be taken to change present laws; and
WHEREAS, The federal tax law is administered primarily by the Internal Revenue Service, a bureau of the Department of the Treasury; and
WHEREAS, While the main intent of the law is to provide revenue for the federal government, the tax code is frequently used for public policy reasons, i.e. to achieve social and economic goals; and
WHEREAS, Veterans under 59½ years of age will pay a 10 percent penalty on amount drawn from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA); and
WHEREAS, Total amount of withdrawal from IRAs is subject to federal income tax; and
WHEREAS, Due to a poor economy, IRAs have lost value; and
WHEREAS, Veterans home mortgages may be higher than the value of said home; and
WHEREAS, High unemployment has caused hardship to the veterans income from other sources in the family; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to permit veterans who are permanent and total 100 percent service-disabled and/or permanent and total 100 percent service-disabled with individual unemployability the opportunity to rollover their individual retirement accounts into tax free Roth accounts, prior to maturity, without penalty or tax liabilities.

Resolution No. 341: Support Recognition of Military and Pay When Calculating Starting Federal Civilian Salaries

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Office of Personnel Management’s interpretation of Section 531.203 of Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations does not allow the use of military pay rates to determine the rate of basic pay that may be paid to an individual upon appointment to a civil service position; and
WHEREAS, The interpretation of this law places an undue financial hardship on former members of the Armed Forces and penalizes the individual for serving in the military; and
WHEREAS, It also provides an advantage to non-veterans seeking higher starting salary when entering into federal employment; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that requires federal agencies to take an employee’s military experience and military pay history into consideration when computing that employee’s starting civilian salary.

Resolution No. 344: Support Federal Legislation that Protects the Employment of Veterans in the U.S. Postal Service Mail Processing Facilities that are Slated for Closure

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, As one of the largest employers of veterans and disabled veterans, approximately 25 percent of the 500,000 men and women employed by the U.S. Postal Service are veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Postal Service intends to reduce its service standards that guarantee the delivery of First Class mail within 1-3 days; and

WHEREAS, The reduction of delivery standards will degrade mail transit time for critical veterans’ health care and/or claims documentation, many of which are required to arrive in designated Veterans Affairs Regional Offices with ‘date-certain’ deadlines; and

WHEREAS, The reduction of delivery standards will permit the Postal Service to dramatically reduce its mail processing network in order to dramatically cut costs; and

WHEREAS, The widespread closure of mail processing facilities will threaten approximately 35,000 postal employees, including large numbers of veterans and disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, Federal employment veteran preference protections are inapplicable when a federal facility is closed; and

WHEREAS, Federal veteran preference protections will be upheld when mail processing facilities alternatively are downsized, but not closed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to support legislation requiring the U.S. Postal Service to preserve current service standards guaranteeing the delivery of First Class mail within 1-3 days, preserving quick mail transit times for the Department of Veterans Affairs claims documentation and/or medications; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to support legislation that limits closures of mail processing facilities, while protecting veterans employment within the U.S. Postal Service.

Resolution No. 345: Support for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program Hiring More Counselors and Employment Coordinators

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of war veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The intent of the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program is to retrain and educate service-disabled veterans so they may find productive jobs compatible with their disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Currently, the caseload for the VR&E Program is one employment coordinator per 141 cases; and
WHEREAS, The average veteran is enrolled in VR&E for approximately 700 days, in part due to large caseloads of vocational rehabilitation counselors and lack of individualized care; and

WHEREAS, Veterans, especially those of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, continue to have higher unemployment rates than non-veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports an increase in funding that would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program to hire more vocational rehabilitation counselors and employment coordinators, to minimize the caseload so veterans have more individualized counseling as well as ensure them of ample employment opportunities once they complete the program.


Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, It is incumbent upon the government of the United States to not only provide for the rehabilitation of disabled veterans, but to also make every effort to aid all veterans in their return to a normal and productive life; and

WHEREAS, Federal law gives preference to employers to hire veterans and their widows; and

 WHEREAS, Fewer than half of the employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor are veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourages Congress to conduct an investigation into the employment of veterans by the various agencies of the federal government; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports remedial legislation, as may be needed, to increase the percentage of veterans hired in all agencies; specifically, the Department of Veterans Affairs to 50 percent or above.

Resolution No. 348: Support Legislation that Bolsters the Hiring of Veterans in the Public and Private Sectors

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Congress enacted laws to help veterans find suitable employment; and

WHEREAS, Federal contractors receive taxpayer money from the federal government to conduct business; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Labor has failed to provide proper oversight to ensure that federal contractors are abiding by the laws required of them in regards to veterans, particularly Title 38, USC 4212; and

WHEREAS, Many governmental departments have done a poor job in hiring veterans, particularly disabled veterans; and many veterans do not know how to appeal employment decisions when they believe their eligibility for preference was not properly considered; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to modify Title 38, USC 4212 to require that any information collected through the VETS-100, a required annual filing for federal contractors receiving over $100,000 that lists the number of veterans they employ, be made available to the
public and in a user friendly format for both veterans and those who assist veterans in locating employment; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation that will require that all governmental agencies clearly supply information to veterans, at the time of their application for employment, which clearly identifies the proper procedure for filing complaints should any veteran believe his or her rights have been violated under any law or regulation related to veterans’ preference; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to hold regular hearings with governmental departments that have a poor record in hiring veterans, particularly disabled veterans, to highlight the issue and take necessary actions to discontinue such actions.

Resolution No. 351: Support Tax Credit for Certain Employers
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, More than 265,300 members of the National Guard and Reserves components served on active-duty during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm (1990-1991); and

WHEREAS, According to Defense Manpower Data Systems, since 1991, an additional 63,938 members of the Reserve components served on active-duty during the military operations known as Southern Watch, Joint Forge and Uphold Democracy; and

WHEREAS, Currently, another 71,000 Reserve Components are supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn; and

WHEREAS, The vast majority of those men and women left jobs and careers in the civilian community to answer the call of their country; and

WHEREAS, Many of those veterans and their families suffered economic hardship as the result of that service because the military salaries they received while on active-duty were often much lower than the salaries paid by their civilian employers; and

WHEREAS, While some employers were able to make up the difference between their employee’s military pay and their regular civilian salary, most employers could not, or would not, make up the difference between the two; and

WHEREAS, There is no incentive for employers to make up the difference between an employee’s military pay and their regular salary; and

WHEREAS, The financial disadvantages suffered by many members of the Reserves and National Guard who are called to active-duty could very possibly serve as a major impediment to the recruitment and retention of a competent Reserve component of the military total force; and

WHEREAS, The recent downsizing of the Armed Forces resulted in increased reliance on Reserves and National Guard units for military operation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion sponsor and support legislation providing tax credits to any employer who either pays an employee who is called to active-duty their regular salary or who makes up the difference between that person’s military pay and their regular civilian salary.

Resolution No. 353: Support a Veteran-Centric Website for Employment
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion has identified the complicated hiring process followed by the Federal government and is seeking reform of that process; and

WHEREAS, The USAJobs.com website offers a confusing, multi-layered application process that involves questionnaires, essay style answers and a list of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA’s) that affect the overall rating of a veteran’s application; and
WHEREAS, It has been the finding of numerous surveys and studies that, for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of veterans of the armed forces are disadvantaged in pursuing civilian employment and careers; and

WHEREAS, There is no single job bank system nationwide that veterans can use to transition from military service to civilian life; and

WHEREAS, It is the intent and purpose of Congress that the Department of Labor’s (DOL), Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) provide the leadership, direction and oversight of all placement and employment services for veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Office of the Inspector General within DOL received recent reports which recommended that VETS increase its oversight of this program, which confirms that services for veterans be provided by the direction of, and subject to oversight by, Congress to ensure that all veterans are afforded such services in a uniform manner following completion of their service and return to their state of residence; and

WHEREAS, It is imperative that the new job bank system be developed to assist veterans in reaching employers and assist employers in reaching qualified veterans; consequently, it is necessary that the system be designed to only allow quality resumes and quality job openings; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support, assist and provide guidance in the design and implementation of a nationwide job bank system for the sole purpose of providing transitioning military members and veterans with a one-stop system of jobs for veterans under the jurisdiction of Department of Labor’s, Veterans’ Employment and Training Service.

Resolution No. 354: Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The United States government has recognized that employment of veterans is a national responsibility and that alleviating unemployment or underemployment of honorably discharged veterans is a national priority; and

WHEREAS, Unemployment rates of individuals recently separated from military service is unacceptable because America’s employers have been lax in hiring those ex-servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, The Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program created by Congress encourages employees to hire targeted applicants, but present program language is too restrictive and fails to include many veterans who are receiving food stamps, welfare or seeking job vocational rehabilitation when requesting employment; and

WHEREAS, Expansion of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program to include those and other categories of separated members of the Armed Forces will in the long run promote recruitment and retention of members in all branches of the military services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion request Congress for changes in legislation relating to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program to include:

1. All members of the military who have served active-duty and/or still on active-duty for training who have served more than 180 days since September of 2001

2. That this benefit will be extended beyond September 1.
Resolution No. 355: Veterans Employment Initiative  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Significant hurdles to veterans employment in the federal government exist despite veterans’ preference laws, including deficiencies in federal agency human resource departments and a lack of adequate information on the part of veterans about how to obtain federal employment; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 13518 created a Veterans Employment Initiative in response to these hurdles, but provides only general guidance to covered agencies as to how the initiative is to how be implemented; and

WHEREAS, The government-wide Veterans’ Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan for FY 2010–FY 2012, published as part of the Veterans Employment Initiative, also sets out general goals; and

WHEREAS, Many of the goals described in the three-year strategic plan have been met less than a year after the plan was published, leading to the impression that in the strategic plan has set the bar too low; and

WHEREAS, Because each agency or department named in Executive Order 13518 is required to develop its own operational plan and standards, there is no efficient way for the government, the individual veteran, or the public at large to track these plans and their outcomes; and

WHEREAS, Some agencies are absent from the list of agencies participating in the Veterans Employment Initiative; and

WHEREAS, Neither Executive Order 13518, nor the strategic plan establish metrics to assess whether the Veterans Employment Initiative is successful; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Executive Order 13518 and the strategic plan be supplemented to include measurable, specific goals and specific metrics to better assess the effects and successes of the Veterans Employment Initiative; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Executive Order 13518 and the Veterans Employment Initiative include all federal agencies and departments; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That there be further development of the Veterans Employment Initiative to provide enforcement and oversight mechanisms and rights or benefits enforceable by law to any veteran.

Resolution No. 358: Support Veterans’ Preference in Public Employment  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Our federal government specially selected as mentally, morally, and physically fit, certain members from its society; specially trained this group, subjected them to stringent rules and regulations, removed them from home, family and employment, asked of them a special sacrifice, required some of them to suffer wounds they will live with forever; and

WHEREAS, A grateful nation through its representative in the Congress of the United States and state legislatures has in recognition of that special service and loss of employment opportunity while defending the country in time of need, extended a long history of employing the returning veterans by enacting the Veterans’ Preference Act; and

WHEREAS, The term “veteran” includes every category of socioeconomics, gender, age, religion, ethnic group, race, and creed; and

WHEREAS, Absence from the highly competitive job market due to military service creates an unfair and unequal burden on veterans in competing for employment with non-veteran peers upon completion of military service; and
WHEREAS, The veterans’ preference law accomplished the legislative purpose of honoring veterans and provides a small advantage in competing for federal and state government jobs; and

WHEREAS, Veterans’ preference requires a veteran must be fully qualified for the position sought; and

WHEREAS, There are reported incidents of hiring officials in both the federal and state government agencies who have ignored veterans’ preference in selecting new employees; and

WHEREAS, There have been federal and state legislative efforts to repeal or avoid application of veterans’ preference in hiring practices; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion deplores each and every attempt to degrade, dilute, or modify the historical precedence of giving job eligibility preference to those who are taken from their communities to serve their country in time of war; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That all lawmakers at every level of government are urged to oppose any and all efforts to repeal or circumvent veterans’ preference in government hiring practices; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That all executives at every level of government are urged to enforce veterans’ preference in their respective government agencies.

Committee on Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness

Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment

Resolution No. 254: Raise Ceiling on VA Home Loans for Two Legally Married Eligible Veterans

Origin: Illinois

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, It is the sincere desire of The American Legion to see all veterans realize the American dream of owning their own home; and

WHEREAS, Real estate prices for homes in certain parts of the country far exceed the maximum VA loan amount of $417,000 (higher in certain counties); and

WHEREAS, Two veterans, married to each other and each having entitlement in their own right to $417,000, are limited to the ceiling of $417,000 (higher in certain counties) if they purchase a home together; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to change the ceiling on a VA loan to $834,000 in those situations where two eligible veterans are married to each other and purchase a home together.
Resolution No. 269: Surviving Spouse Mortgage Eligibility  
Origin: Illinois  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 350 (Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education))

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who meet certain criteria are eligible for the VA home loan program for as long as they live and in certain circumstances may use this benefit several times; and

WHEREAS, Once the veteran expires this benefit does not pass onto the surviving spouse except in those situations where the veteran died of a service-related condition or died in service; and

WHEREAS, Veterans are usually the primary income provider for the household and contribute the majority of payments to mortgages for the family; and

WHEREAS, Once the veteran dies the mortgage payments must continue to be paid and the burden falls on the surviving spouse; and

WHEREAS, The surviving spouse may have to downsize and/or move to a different area to obtain a more affordable dwelling; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and support legislation to allow the surviving spouse of a veteran who was determined to be eligible for the VA loan program to use this same entitlement for a one time guarantee of a new mortgage and that this eligibility be good for up to fifteen years after the veteran dies or the surviving spouse remarries.

Resolution No. 304: Support Accountability for Institutions of Higher Learning  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is concerned over the education of America’s service member and student-veterans, and their ability to acquire gainful employment after earning degrees from institutions of higher learning; and

WHEREAS, More than 30 federal and state law enforcement agencies have made findings, in ongoing investigations or lawsuits - and in 15 federal and state settlements since 2012 - that some institutions of higher learning have deceived students about the schools’ quality of education, tuition and cost, transferability of credits, accreditation, and graduates’ job prospects and salary, including deceptions about graduates’ eligibility to work in licensed occupations; and

WHEREAS, Accreditation has become a key point of issue of both the political and policy communities and few of those who are critical of it understand the present system, which is a big part of the problem; and

WHEREAS, Before any meaningful reform can be undertaken, there needs to be an agreement as to whether the present system is “too difficult” or “too lax” and whether the desired end goal is a regulatory enforcement body or one of quality assurance; and

WHEREAS, The state approving agencies have been tasked with changing their role from proactive oversight of all schools to performing Veterans Affairs compliance surveys on benefits already paid, but are ill-equipped to undertake such a task due to the lack of manpower and funds to adequately perform both Veterans Affairs compliance surveys and proper proactive oversight of for-profit schools and their programs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to provide additional resources and increased funding for state approving agencies, ensuring continuation of its primary responsibility with focus in
reviewing, evaluating, and approving quality programs of education and training, while providing oversight to institutions of higher learning to ensure alignment with state and federal criteria on behalf of servicemember and student-veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion expresses its strong support for legislation and federal agency action to ensure educational success and civilian workforce success of GI Bill users and military student program participants, including colleges that enroll veterans in loans they did not need, want, or authorize; to ensure prospective students are armed with all the information needed to make an informed college choice; to take steps to ensure better quality and student outcomes for institutions approved for use of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion expresses its strong support for the VA regulations requiring for-profit institutions be held to the same standards and criteria as non-profit institutions for the purpose of approval for use of VA education benefits.

Resolution No. 308: Amending the Eligibility for the Transfer of the Post-9/11 GI Bill Educational Benefits

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Eligible servicemembers can share the Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits with their immediate families only if they were on active-duty on August 1, 2009, had completed six years of active-duty military service and committed to serve four more years; and

WHEREAS, When Congress passed the new GI Bill, a provision was included to allow the transfer of education benefits to immediate family members; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense wanted to entice troops to reenlist, so the transferability benefit only applies to servicemembers with 10 years of active-duty service or a commitment to serve 10 years; and

WHEREAS, A spouse can begin using transferred benefits before the additional four years are served, but children may not use benefits until a servicemember has completed at least 10 years of service; and

WHEREAS, Servicemembers with 10 years of active-duty service or more; who are eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits; who were not on active-duty on August 1, 2009; and who were prevented from committing to another four years by the Department of Defense; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that would authorize all servicemembers with 10 years or more of active-duty service, who are eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits, but left the Armed Forces before August 1, 2009, be able to use the transferability entitlement to give to their immediate family members.

Resolution No. 312: Eliminate Delimiting Dates for the Montgomery GI Bill and Post-9/11 GI Bill

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 – the original GI Bill; and
WHEREAS, This GI Bill helped our veterans to pursue a higher education; and
WHEREAS, The Montgomery GI Bill is now in place; and
WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill is now in place; and
WHEREAS, The benefit of a higher education is still viewed as a vehicle to economic security; and
WHEREAS, The present ten year delimiting date for the Montgomery GI Bill and fifteen year delimiting date for the Post-9/11 GI Bill to utilize this benefit should not exist; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That there be no time constraint with regards to the Montgomery GI Bill and Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Resolution No. 313: Support Elimination Funding Fees for Government Guaranteed Loans
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Currently numerous agencies offer government guaranteed loan programs; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Export Import Bank provides guarantee term financing to international buyers in both the private and public sector, and finances the local costs up to 30 percent; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has numerous Guaranteed Loan Programs to finance economic development, housing rehabilitation, public facilities, and large-scale physical development projects in certain communities; and

WHEREAS, The Small Business Administration is currently waiving fees for veteran-owned small businesses on Express Loans between $150,000 and $300,000 for Fiscal Year 2015; and

WHEREAS, Guarantee fees, which are calculated as a percentage of the loan based on maturity and loan value, typically cost borrowers thousands of dollars; and

WHEREAS, The funding fees charged to veterans were enacted to defray the costs of the loan programs and keep the budget for these programs outside of regular appropriations; and

WHEREAS, Funding fees collected each year from non-veterans can still cover the costs of operating these programs; and

WHEREAS, Providing fee waivers for veteran-owned small businesses is a simple and effective way of supporting veteran entrepreneurship; and

WHEREAS, Providing fee waivers for all veterans is a simple and effective way for the nation to recognize the service and sacrifices all veterans have made; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the elimination of Government Guaranteed Loan Funding Fees for veteran applicants.

Resolution No. 314: Support Elimination of the VA Home Loan Funding Fee
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Loan Guaranty Program has been in effect since 1944 and has afforded approximately 20 million veterans the opportunity to purchase and refinance homes; and

WHEREAS, The VA Home Loan Guaranty Program offers veterans an affordable and easy to use method of purchasing homes in return for their service to this nation; and

WHEREAS, The VA funding fee charged to veterans was enacted into law to defray the costs of the VA guaranteed home loan program; and

WHEREAS, Funding fees collected each year virtually always exceed the costs of operating the program; and

WHEREAS, The current fee of 2.15 percent for first-time users amounts to a principal payment of nearly $4,500 by the veteran on the current average loan of $209,000; and
WHEREAS, This is the equivalent of requiring the veteran to "purchase" a benefit that historically could be used cost free; and
WHEREAS, The VA funding fee that is collected goes to a Department of Treasury account that sustains that VA Home Loan Program, with excess monies used to pay for other federal government programs and expenses; and
WHEREAS, Congress is required to fund the operation of the home loan program because the program has "permanent and indefinite budget authority"; and
WHEREAS, The funding fee paid to VA has had a negative effect on many veterans by adding significantly to the cost of a VA loan, or by deterring other veterans from using an earned benefit; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the elimination of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Loan funding fee; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion petition Congress to appropriate funding to sustain the VA Home Loan Program.

Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student’s Education at Institutions of Higher Education
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, The American Legion has been encouraged by the growing recognition within Congress of the need to make basic, but critical information about the return on investment in higher education available to student-veterans; and
WHEREAS, Servicemembers and veteran students are changing the discourse of how a growing need for interdisciplinary efforts are needed within institutions of higher learning; and
WHEREAS, Servicemembers and veterans utilizing the GI Bill, Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA), and other education benefits are given certain parameters regarding the way the money is used, the amount of money which can be used, and the time in which the money can be used; and
WHEREAS, Student characteristics and outcomes, along with the changing dynamics of education issues affect servicemembers, veterans, and their families differently at public, nonprofit, and for-profit schools; and
WHEREAS, Congressional committees, Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans service organizations, state approving agencies, educational organizations, and educational institutions all need to work together to ensure veterans are fully aware of the educational opportunities provided for them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion seek and support any legislative or administrative proposal that improves, but not limited to, the GI Bill, Department of Defense Tuition Assistance (TA), Higher Education Title IV funding (i.e., Pell Grants, student loans, etc.) and education benefits so servicemembers, veterans, and their families can maximize its usage; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to find a solution that ensures colleges and universities that receive federal tuition payments grant priority enrollment to those individuals who qualify for either the Department of Defense or Department of Veterans Affairs education benefits.
Resolution No. 321: Support Extended Time for Mortgage Payments for Servicemembers

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Currently, servicemembers are forced to sell their homes at a loss when they move on government orders; and

WHEREAS, Current law requires homes had to be bought by July 1, 2006, and applications for partial reimbursement benefits for financial loss to pay off the mortgage, or assistance if they are forced to default on the mortgage were due by September 30, 2010; and

WHEREAS, Many believe this time period was too restrictive and many members of the Armed Forces failed to qualify for this program; and

WHEREAS, Legislation has been introduced to allow the Department of Defense to change the eligibility dates for a specific military installation when circumstances require; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the enactment of legislation that will provide assistance to servicemen and women who incur a financial loss through no fault of their own when they move due to government orders.

Resolution No. 322: Support Joint Services Transcript Evaluation of Military Training and Experience of Veterans, Active-Duty, Reserve and National Guard Personnel

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Veterans are in need of academic post-military degree and certificate credentials universally recognizable by employers for employment opportunities; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DOD) has already spared no expense to provide our military personnel with some of the best vocational training in the nation paid for by past federal budgets of the United States; and

WHEREAS, DOD establishes, measures and evaluates performance standards for every occupation within the Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, The American Council on Education (ACE) has evaluated most of the training for these military occupations and provided guidelines for awarding college-level credit for such training; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 1,900 institutions of higher learning formed the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), which was created in 1972 to provide educational opportunities to servicemembers who, because they frequently moved from place to place, had trouble completing college degrees; and

WHEREAS, SOC functions in cooperation with 15 higher education associations, DOD, and the Active and Reserve Components of the military services to expand and improve voluntary post-secondary education opportunities for servicemembers worldwide; and

WHEREAS, SOC is funded by the DOD through a contract with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the contract is managed for DOD by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES); and

WHEREAS, There are many occupational career fields in the Armed Forces that have been evaluated by ACE using the Joint Services Transcript System into recommended Vocational Certificate, Lower Division Baccalaureate/Associate Degree, Upper Division Baccalaureate and Graduate University, Community College and Technical School academic credit; and
WHEREAS, There are many occupations in the civilian workforce that require a civilian college/university degree, or vocational certificate; and

WHEREAS, In the Armed Forces, these unique occupations are performed to approved military standards that may meet or exceed the civilian college/university or vocational academic coursework criteria; and

WHEREAS, Upon separation from military service, many former military personnel, certified as proficient in their military occupational career, have recommended college/university and vocational academic credit based on the ACE Military Evaluation process; and

WHEREAS, Since 1945, ACE has evaluated military training and experience to gauge eligibility for university, college and vocational credit recommendations; and

WHEREAS, In 1974, ACE Military Programs began the assessment of military occupational specialties; and

WHEREAS, More than 2,200 higher education institutions consider the ACE Military Programs course credit recommendations and these credit recommendations can also assist in the servicemember’s career advancement; and

WHEREAS, In March, 2013, the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard combined their individual transcript systems into one system called the Joint Services Transcript System; and

WHEREAS, DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) require colleges, universities, vocational and technical schools, both public and private, to evaluate prior learning and previous academic transcripts and credit, prior to a veteran, active-duty, Reserve or National Guard to be in receipt of funds for training or education at civilian institutions of higher learning to include colleges, universities and vocational technical schools; and

WHEREAS, DOD has already paid for the training of its personnel for their military occupations and the taxpayers of the United States should not be burdened by paying for the training again in the form of the GI Bill or any federally-funded training program; and

WHEREAS, DOD Tuition Assistance, VA Education or any form of the GI Bill requires this evaluation, and a fully completed degree or certificate plan to ensure compliance with DOD and VA regulations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support efforts of academic credit evaluation by colleges, universities and vocational technical schools via the Joint Services Transcript system for military experience as evaluated college, university and vocational technical school credit; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support efforts to increase the understanding that without this required evaluation of Joint Services Transcripts that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education funding through the GI Bill oftentimes duplicates funding for military training already received by the Department of Defense (DOD); and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That DOD and VA change the current required degree plan used by colleges, universities and vocational technical institutions of higher learning to be in receipt of DOD Tuition Assistance or VA GI Bill funds be required to evaluate and report the Joint Services Transcript of veterans, active-duty military, Reserve and National Guard just as they would for any other transcript from an institution of prior learning.

Resolution No. 324: Support Funding for Homeless Veterans
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Congress of the United States has passed legislation to fund the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program,
WHEREAS, Some of these programs have been in partnership with veterans service organization and other nonprofit organizations; and

WHEREAS, VA estimates that 40,000 veterans are currently homeless; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been an active partner with VA with the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans, CWT, Grant and Per Diem, and Supportive Services for Veteran Families Programs; and

WHEREAS, These programs have proved to be successful in rehabilitation of the veteran in helping him/her to become a productive citizen; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion renew its commitment to assisting homeless veterans and their families; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continue to support the efforts of public and private sector agencies and organizations with the resources necessary to aid homeless veterans and their families; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion seek and support any legislative or administrative proposal that will provide medical, rehabilitative, and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families.

Resolution No. 325: Support Funding and Changes to VA’s Grant and Per Diem Program

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to award grants to community-based agencies to create transitional housing programs and offer per diem payments; and

WHEREAS, The purpose of the program is to promote the development and provision of supportive housing and/or supportive services with the goal of helping homeless veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skills levels and/or income, and obtain greater self-management; and

WHEREAS, GPD funded projects offer communities a way to help homeless veterans with housing and services while assisting VA medical centers by augmenting or supplementing care; and

WHEREAS, Many homeless veterans have legal and past financial hardships they must overcome and GPD often serves as a transition point for veterans as they obtain permanent housing; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, 70 percent of veterans in GPD transitioned to permanent housing; and

WHEREAS, The most recent data from the VA points to a need for at least 14,500 GPD beds nationwide to continue to provide emergency housing and rapid stabilization services to homeless veterans with specialized needs – women veterans, single veterans with dependent children, veterans transitioning out of incarceration, veterans with mild to moderate mental illness, veterans who become homeless due to sudden or worsening economic hardship and loss of employment; and

WHEREAS, The GPD program has proved to be successful in rehabilitation of the veteran in helping him/her to become a productive citizen; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports Congress authorizing and making appropriations for the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program to the level of need demonstrated in communities; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommends the GPD program be modernized in order to keep pace with the Department of Veterans Affairs goal to end and prevent veteran homelessness; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that protects the eligibility for homeless services of veterans with other than dishonorable discharges who desperately need assistance through the GPD program.

Resolution No. 326: Support Funding for Additional Housing for Homeless Veterans with Families

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program represents an entirely new and wholly unique model for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and
WHEREAS, SSVF is the first and only VA program that provides services to veterans and their families; and
WHEREAS, It is a community-based, competitive grant program that rapidly rehouses homeless veterans families and prevents homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis; and
WHEREAS, The program's objective is to achieve housing stability through a short-term, focused intervention and in the first four years of operation, SSVF has had a dramatic impact; and
WHEREAS, In FY 2015 almost 100,000 veterans and their family members (98,990 people in total) received direct assistance from SSVF and 80 percent of those exiting SSVF had permanent housing; and
WHEREAS, In the first year (2011), 86 percent (16,204) of program participants who exited the program, including 86 percent of veterans who exited, had a successful permanent housing outcome at an average of $2,810 per household; and
WHEREAS, Results in the second year were comparable with 84 percent (41,104) of program participants and 82 percent of veterans in permanent housing at exit, but with a lower average cost per household of $2,480, a cost reduction of 12 percent on average per household; and
WHEREAS, This reduction in cost is largely driven by lower service costs and greater efficiencies achieved by renewal grantees in Fiscal Year 2013; and
WHEREAS, At a time when the number of homeless veterans on any given night hovers at approximately 40,000, the need for safe, affordable, and permanent housing is imperative; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation or administrative proposals that provide additional transitional and permanent housing for homeless veterans with families.

Resolution No. 327: Support Further Assessment and Evaluation of Institutions of Higher Learning to Enable Veterans to Make Informed Education Choices

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Military and student-veterans are targeted for deceptive and aggressive recruiting – as documented by U.S. Senate reports and two undercover U.S. Government Accountability Office investigations – because of a loophole in federal education law through which the GI Bill and Defense Department student program funds are able to be counted as “private funds” to offset a cap the schools face on federal funds; and
WHEREAS, Some institutions of higher learning have engaged in fraudulent and improper recruiting activities; and
WHEREAS, Learning outcome-assessment has become the basis for determining institutional effectiveness; however, the availability of valid, widely accepted tools and methods needed to determine learning and skill acquisition are proving hard to come by; and

WHEREAS, The GI Bill Comparison Tool offers veterans an unprecedented amount of information data to determine education choices; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support oversight and legislation evaluating post-secondary education institutions on quality factors, such as, but not limited to, accreditation, transferability, cost, graduation rates, and acceptance in the job market; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion pursue opportunities to educate service member and student-veterans on selection and attendance at post-secondary education institutions; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports efforts to expand and further disseminate the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill Comparison Tool.

Resolution No. 328: GI Bill Medical Transferability Rights
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, the original GI Bill, was one of the most successful pieces of legislation and spurred over 50 years of economic prosperity; and

WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law in 2008 and is a robust and comprehensive education benefit, which is an enhancement to the original Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944; and

WHEREAS, Congress introduced and passed the Post-9/11 GI Bill Improvements Act of 2010, which was intended to make further improvements to this education benefit; and

WHEREAS, Since August of 2009, servicemembers who have served 6 years and commit to an additional four years of service may transfer all or a portion of their benefits to a spouse and/or their children; and

WHEREAS, Between August 2009 and September 2014, there were 423,355 servicemembers who transferred their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit to 928,078 dependents; and

WHEREAS, Servicemembers who were injured in the line of duty and have undergone a Medical Evaluation Board and Physical Evaluation Board are in certain cases precluded from extending their enlistments; thereby making them ineligible to qualify for the transferability benefit of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Chapter 33 education benefit; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion hereby endorse efforts to establish provisions in law allowing for the transferability of Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits for those medically retired and therefore unable to extend their enlistments needed to qualify for the transferability aspect of the Post-9/11 GI Bill; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Chapter 33 of Title 38, USC, be amended to allow for the transferability of the Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits for Chapter 61 medical retirees who have served since September 10, 2001, and are identified as unfit for further military service, as determined through the Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board process.
Resolution No. 329: Support Home Loan Guaranty Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (P.L. 346 – 78th Congress) established, among other things, a home loan guaranty program that was to be administered by the Veterans Administration, which later became the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, The two purposes of the original program were to help returning World War II veterans in their readjustment to civilian life and to stimulate the economy by assisting those veterans in obtaining mortgages financing from the private sector; and

WHEREAS, Because of the popularity and success of the VA Loan Guaranty Program, and due to how it benefitted the economy as well as eligible veterans, Congress decided to make that five-year pilot program permanent; and

WHEREAS, To date the VA has guaranteed over 20 million loans to eligible veterans and has for the most part, maintained a lower default rate than private sector mortgages; and

WHEREAS, While some of the veterans who have participated in this program could have obtained private sector financing that required a down payment, many others could not have qualified for such financing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion reaffirms its strong support for the Department of Veterans Affairs Loan Guaranty Service and its programs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support any administrative and/or legislative efforts that will improve and strengthen the Loan Guaranty Service's ability to serve America's veterans.

Resolution No. 330: Homeless Veterans Assistance
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, To properly assist homeless veterans in their reintegration into the civilian workforce and self-sufficiency, there needs to be more funding available; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to establish a fund in the Treasury of the United States to be known as the “Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund,” to provide assistance to homeless veterans as a supplement to, but not a replacement for, existing funds for such assistance; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to amend the Internal Revenue Code to allow taxpayers with income tax liability of $3.00 or more to designate $3.00 of said liability for transfer to the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund.

Resolution No. 331: Support Housing Preference for Low-Income Veterans in the Department of Housing and Urban Development
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Currently, there are millions of low-income and elderly veterans; and

WHEREAS, Because many of those veterans are living on fixed incomes, it is often difficult if not impossible for them to provide adequate housing for themselves and their families; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Housing and Urban Development operates affordable housing programs for low-income and senior citizens; and

WHEREAS, Many needy and deserving veterans are unable to participate in those housing programs because of long waiting lists; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports any administrative and/or legislative initiative that will give preference to America's veterans and their families in obtaining housing through the programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Resolution No. 332: Support Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes the nation has a responsibility to ease the difficulties experienced by America's veterans returning to civilian life; and

WHEREAS, In the most severe cases, veterans transitioning home and their families have found themselves homeless; and

WHEREAS, The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program is a collaboration between the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to help homeless veterans and their immediate family members by providing permanent housing with case management and supportive and clinical services provided by VA at its medical centers and community partners that promote and maintain recovery and housing stability; and

WHEREAS, HUD-VASH is a prominent element of VA's plan to eliminate veteran homelessness; and

WHEREAS, HUD allocates rental subsidies from its Housing Choice Voucher program to the VA, which then distributes them to the eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, At a time when the number of homeless veterans on any given night hovers at approximately 40,000, the need for safe, affordable, and permanent housing is imperative; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support funding for another 10,000 housing vouchers for the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program be set aside to assist homeless veterans with permanent housing; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages a higher allocation of project-based Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Support Housing voucher units.

Resolution No. 333: Support Increase in Reporting Fees for Educational Institutions
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, A certifying official is responsible for certifying the enrollment and changes in enrollment of eligible students to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, The certifying official’s primary function is to let VA know if a student is registered for classes, showing the beginning and ending dates, number of credit hours or clock hours per week in attendance, and indicating the status of the student as an undergraduate or graduate student; and

WHEREAS, VA pays an annual reporting fee to schools; and

WHEREAS, The reporting fee is intended to help defray the cost of processing VA certifications; and
WHEREAS, The annual reporting fee is based on the number of VA students, including Chapter 31 (Vocational Rehabilitation), certified by the school during the calendar year; and

WHEREAS, Colleges and universities are always relying on reporting fees from VA to pay for veteran-related activities; and

WHEREAS, Currently, the reporting fees to colleges and universities is $7.00 per student-veteran enrolled; and

WHEREAS, Colleges and universities use certifying officials as the first liaison for a veteran using veterans’ educational benefits; and

WHEREAS, Certifying officials need continuing training in order to properly inform veterans about their education benefits; and

WHEREAS, Veterans enrolled in institutions are in need of a place/location to meet other enrolled veterans to confer and find information for veteran-related assistance; and

WHEREAS, The increase in reporting fees would allow certifying officials to receive initial and recurring training, buy and/or upgrade equipment (i.e., computers) and provide office space for student-veterans to meet; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is dedicated to assuring proper education and information for those who are assisting veterans and their families; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports increasing the amount of the reporting fees payable to educational institutions for certifying officials who assist/enroll veterans receiving educational benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and for other purposes.

Resolution No. 335: Support Major Enhancements for the Montgomery GI Bill
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion first drafted the GI Bill of Rights, which was enacted by Congress in 1944; and

WHEREAS, The nation now has a total force military policy that requires the operational integration and deployment of active-duty, National Guard and Reserve forces; and

WHEREAS, All members of the total force endure the same hardships and sacrifices, including National Guard and Reserve personnel who contribute to every operational mission and deployment; and

WHEREAS, The original purposes of the GI bill are sound and supportable; and

WHEREAS, Many Selective Reserve members have significant readjustment challenges upon discharge from active-duty service; and

WHEREAS, The current structure and management of the Montgomery GI Bill by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs causes administrative confusion and inequitable allocation of benefits; and

WHEREAS, A grateful nation should honor the service of all members of the total force GI Bill that is compatible with the nation’s Total Force military policy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Congress should move the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) – Selected Reserve (SR) from Title 10, the United States Code (USC) to Title 38 USC; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the annual appropriations for the MGIB and the MGIB-SR become one annual appropriation within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That VA has administrative authority for both the MGIB and the MGIB-SR Bill.
Resolution No. 337: Support Licensure and Certification Standards for Veterans Health Administration

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has certain licensures and credentials they require for certain positions; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense provides comprehensive and specific training during military service; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs VHA is looking for highly qualified individuals to fill their job descriptions; and
WHEREAS, Military experience that is gained while serving in the Armed Forces is valuable to healthcare and non-health care related positions found within VHA; and
WHEREAS, All valuable experience while gained on active service can translate into academic education for certain positions within the Department of Veterans Affairs; and
WHEREAS, Servicemembers experience and training can help fill the vacancies for health care and non-health care related positions within VHA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the Department of Veterans Affairs, and specifically the Veterans Health Administration, in allowing military education, training, and experience to be considered towards a license or certification for health care and non-health care related positions that require licenses or credentials.

Resolution No. 338: Support Licensure and Certification of Servicemembers, Veterans and Spouses

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Veterans are in need of employment after exiting the military; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DOD) provides some of the best vocational training in the nation for its military personnel; and
WHEREAS, DOD establishes, measures and evaluates performance standards for every occupation within the Armed Forces; and
WHEREAS, There are many occupational career fields in the Armed Forces that can easily translate to a civilian counterpart; and
WHEREAS, There are many occupations in the civilian workforce that require a license or certification; and
WHEREAS, In the Armed Forces, these unique occupations are performed to approved military standards that may meet or exceed the civilian license or certification criteria; and
WHEREAS, Upon separation, many former military personnel, certified as proficient in their military occupational career, are not licensed or certified to perform the comparable job in the civilian workforce, thus hindering chances for immediate civilian employment and delaying career advancement; and
WHEREAS, This situation creates an artificial barrier to employment upon separation from military service; and
WHEREAS, A study by the Presidential Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance identified a total of 105 military professions where civilian credentialing is required; and
WHEREAS, DOD is obligated to keep such licenses and certifications current and cover the costs of renewal; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
support efforts to eliminate employment barriers that impede the timely and successful transfer of military job skills to the civilian labor market; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support efforts to eliminate spouse employment barriers through advocacy for the recognition and acceptance of spouses credentials regardless of location, as long as the spouse meets standards set forth by the credentialing board; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That all federal and state stakeholders (i.e., Departments of Defense, Energy, Veterans Affairs, and Transportation, along with the National Governors Association and National Conference of State Legislatures) take appropriate steps to ensure that servicemembers and veterans be trained, tested, evaluated and have the opportunity to obtain any credential (i.e., licensure, certification, certificate, degree, etc.) that may be required in the local civilian workforce; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support efforts to increase the civilian labor market’s acceptance of the training, education, and prior experience provided by the Armed Forces.

Resolution No. 340: Support Permanent Authorization for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) primary prevention program designed to help veterans and their families rapidly exit homelessness, or avoid entering homelessness; and

WHEREAS, SSVF funds are granted to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that assist very low-income veteran families by providing a range of supportive services designed to promote housing stability; and

WHEREAS, The vast majority of VA’s homeless programs are necessarily geared toward rehabilitation – more than half of the homeless veteran population suffers from physical disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders; and

WHEREAS, The SSVF program is critical because it serves an at-risk veteran population that is ten times larger than the homeless veteran cohort, yet has no other dedicated funding source for the homelessness prevention services it needs; and

WHEREAS, SSVF is intended to be a short-term intervention, and it is crucial in serving those veteran families who may only need minor, one-time assistance to prevent or end their homelessness. Grantees provide low-income families with case management services and direct supportive services, including rental assistance, utilities assistance, child care costs, moving costs, transportation expenses, emergency supplies and security deposits; and

WHEREAS, In FY 2015, approximately 100,000 homeless veterans and at-risk veterans and their families were served with these funds; and

WHEREAS, The SSVF program has proved to be successful in stabilizing homeless and at-risk veterans with housing and other relevant services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion recommend Congress to permanently authorize and adequately fund the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program, which is the only national, veteran specific program to help at-risk veterans avoid becoming homeless, and rapidly rehouse those veteran families who lose their housing.
Resolution No. 342: Support and Strengthen the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA)
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been the leading veterans advocacy organization since its inception in 1919; and
WHEREAS, Such advocacy resulted in the creation and passage of the Service-members Civil Relief Act (SCRA), formerly known as the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act, and the original GI Bill, codifying into federal law benefits earned by active and former members of the United States military as a result of their honorable service during a time of war; and
WHEREAS, Both the GI Bill and SCRA have been legislatively updated on occasion by the United States Congress to reflect societal changes and rising costs of providing said benefits; and
WHEREAS, It is the intention of the SCRA to protect members of the United States military called to active-duty by duly authorized and issued orders and their immediate family; and
WHEREAS, Such protection is not extended to include the necessary termination of a contract under Family or Group plans, nor to the necessary cancellation of reservations for air or train transportation, resulting in unnecessary, unintended and expensive costs incurred by servicemembers who are obeying the task placed upon them by duly authorized orders; and
WHEREAS, Such costs coincide with negative credit reports which further exacerbate the ability of the service-member to perform his or her duty, and impacts the ability of the individual or family to realize the American dream and own a home by punitive credit rates; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Congress be urged to amend the Service-members Civil Relief Act to include protections for members of the Armed Forces, and their families, acting under duly authorized and issued orders to include, but not limited to, deployment and temporary duty assignment orders against fees, fines and the resulting negative credit reports by cancellation of ticketed travel on U.S. airlines or train transportation.

Resolution No. 343: Support Student-Veterans Return-On-Investment Education Outcomes
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion, over the past several months, has been encouraged by the growing recognition within Congress of the need to make basic, but critical, information about the return on investment in higher education available to student-veterans; and
WHEREAS, Student debt and college costs are reaching new heights, and the public is increasingly questioning the benefit of a college degree; and
WHEREAS, Information about the value of specific degrees will allow those directly affected by higher education, students, families, taxpayers, policymakers, institutions, and employers, to make informed decisions; and
WHEREAS, Federal taxpayers spend more than $150 billion a year on federal financial aid, $30 billion on GI Bill benefits, and $1 billion on military tuition assistance, while students, states, and employers spend billions more, yet we cannot get answers to basic, fundamental questions; and
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WHEREAS, With significant federal investment in programs and institutions, policymakers should demand better information about the effectiveness of higher education; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Congress is urged to embrace outcomes-focused data systems that produce information which enable stakeholders to make informed decisions; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to pursue systems that provide timely, contextual, and actionable data necessary to calculate “return on investment” measures, but also to document continuous improvement within higher education institutions and training programs, as this information is vital to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment which are all critical pieces of the efforts to improve the outcomes of our education and workforce development systems; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress not make any legislative changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill that may unduly harm veterans in their pursuit of a vocation that leads to gainful employment.

Resolution No. 347: Veterans Education Debt Forgiveness
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a very good educational benefit and in most cases will cover most if not all of the education expenses for veterans going to school; and

WHEREAS, In some cases where veterans pick a very expensive school and their benefits may not cover all expenses, or a veteran has used up their maximum months of benefits, or a veteran has gone beyond their delimiting date; and

WHEREAS, In these cases they may take out a student loan to assist them in covering expenses; and

WHEREAS, Through no fault of their own they may later be rated permanently and totally disabled for Department of Veterans Affairs compensation benefits; and

WHEREAS, Under Title 34 of the CFR’s Part 682, Subpart D 682.402, veterans may have their education loan discharged if they receive such a rating; and

WHEREAS, Under Section 61(a) (12) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 this discharge of indebtedness is considered fully taxable; and

WHEREAS, This is extremely unfair to have one part of the government forgive a debt and then have another part of the government tax the amount forgiven, placing an extreme hardship on the veteran; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend the Internal Revenue Code, Section 61(a) (12), to not consider a discharged debt taxable when a veteran is rated permanently and totally disabled.

Resolution No. 349: Support Legislation to Improve the Post-9/11 GI Bill
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, the original GI Bill, was one of the most successful pieces of legislation and spurred over 50 years of economic prosperity; and
WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law in 2008 and is a robust and comprehensive education benefit, rivaling the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, providing the tools and resources veterans need to be a success; and

WHEREAS, Congress introduced and passed the Post-9/11 GI Bill Improvements Act of 2010, which aimed at fixing some of the unintended consequences of the Post-9/11 GI Bill; and

WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill Improvements Act of 2010 has a provision which allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as being the payer last resort after any other aid was provided, such as state funded tuition; and

WHEREAS, The Post-9/11 GI Bill Improvements Act of 2010 eliminated break pay, otherwise known as interval pay, for students of both the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program (chapter 31); and

WHEREAS, Certain veterans rely on this break pay to meet financial obligations they and their family require and cannot afford to miss interval/break pay even for a brief period, which the Post-9/11 GI Bill Improvements Act of 2010 eliminated; and

WHEREAS, Under current law, states that offer free tuition to veterans will be the first payer with the Department of Veterans Affairs paying the disparity for those eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill; and

WHEREAS, This change makes it difficult for the schools to keep track of the funding and where the money should come from and then the VA deducts this funding from the veteran’s GI Bill pay; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation ensuring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Post-9/11 GI Bill as a first payer and the non-federal entities for those who require additional funding to go to those veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to restore funding in the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Programs for veterans attending school during this break or interval between terms; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommends that VA sustain full tuition and fees reimbursement for veterans attending public undergraduate colleges, while setting a national standard for private and graduate schools.

Resolution No. 352: Transitional Housing Allotments for Returning Combat Veterans

WHEREAS, Unlike the active-duty component that are stationed stateside in the final months of their service, National Guardsmen and Reservists are fully employed in a combat zone up until the final day that they redeploy back to the continental United States; and

WHEREAS, At the demobilization site, returning veterans undergo approximately three weeks of physicals, transition programs, reunion with family members and inventory accountability; and

WHEREAS, There is little time for these servicemembers to start the process of finding a home, apartment, room or other dwelling; and

WHEREAS, Families are sometimes unaccommodating to returning veterans and cannot or refuse to house them; and

WHEREAS, Young veterans are living with their families, friends, in hotels, in cars, and are homeless; and

WHEREAS, Many single soldiers stay at hotels and are burning up their savings earned over the prior year; and

WHEREAS, Veterans are having to enter unfair leases/agreements just to find a place to stay because they are in dire need; and
WHEREAS, Veterans are ineligible to live in campus housing due to the likelihood of returning in the middle of a semester and are unable to start college for four more months; and
WHEREAS, For nine months out of the year, universities are in their lengthy fall and spring semester terms and these young men and women can't restart their academic careers until the next term starts; therefore, they are not eligible to live on campus; and
WHEREAS, Approximately 90,000 National Guard and Reserve have been re-entering the private sector each year since 2001; and
WHEREAS, A 180-day ‘buffer’ period will allow veterans to transition back in to the civilian sector with much greater ease and will prevent homelessness; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the creation of a program by Congress for returning veterans similar to Basic Allowance for Housing upon return from mobilization for 180 days.

Resolution No. 356: Veterans Home Loans
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, Legislation to amend the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax code to delete the requirement that State Veterans Home Loans may only be made to those veterans who are within twenty-five years of date of discharge is pending in Congress; and
WHEREAS, This change in the IRS tax code would allow thousands of veterans to become eligible for a State Veterans Home Loan; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports amending the Internal Revenue Service tax code to delete the requirement that State Veterans Home Loans may only be made to those veterans who are within twenty-five years of date of discharge.

Resolution No. 357: Support Veterans Housing Repair and Modification for Pilot Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, Of America’s 21 million veterans, 6 million are disabled and 1.5 million are at-risk of homelessness; and
WHEREAS, For veterans returning home with severe injuries such as amputation or traumatic brain injury, readjustment and reintegration can be hampered by the lack of a wheelchair ramp or the ability to take a shower; and
WHEREAS, This situation is partially addressed through the Specially Adaptive Housing Program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and this program provides grants to eligible disabled veterans and servicemembers for housing adaptations due to disability; and
WHEREAS, The Specially Adaptive Housing Program does not fully address the urgent need to help those who have honorably served this nation; and
WHEREAS, A pilot program that serves veterans who are low-income or disabled and who own their homes or are living in the owner-occupied home of a family member would be extremely beneficial; and
WHEREAS, The pilot program would include simple repairs to help keep veterans safe and healthy and out of more costly health care facilities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
support the creation of a veterans housing pilot program for home rehabilitation and modification to augment programs like the Specially Adaptive Housing Program, to allow veterans service organizations and housing nonprofits to combine their resources with other federal funding by applying for grants through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 235 (SC): Troops to Teachers Program

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN OXFORD: Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate to this convention from the Department of North Carolina, I move for the adoption of this report. ...Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion, and I've heard several seconds. Is there any discussion? All in favor, indicate by the usual sign. Opposed? The report is adopted.

Presentation: Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Daniel J. O’Connor was the Chairman of the National Americanism Commission from 1962 to 1983. He was chairman emeritus from 1984 until his passing in 2004. The Daniel J. O’Connor Americanism Trophy is given to the department that achieves the most outstanding results in conducting Americanism programs. These programs advance patriotism among the citizens of this nation and participation in our youth activities. Ladies and gentlemen, the winner of the Daniel J. O’Connor Americanism Trophy is the Department of Virginia. (Applause)


DELEGATE QUECK: I'd just like to thank the Department of Virginia for giving me the opportunity to be the Americanism chairman for this year. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Department of Virginia. The Chair recognizes Richard Anderson of Connecticut, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Americanism for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Americanism

Richard W. Anderson, Connecticut, Chairman

Ninety-one members of your Convention Committee on Americanism met at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, August 28, 2016, in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Rooms 202 & 203, Second Floor, Cincinnati, Ohio, to discuss matters of Americanism-related resolutions. A quorum was declared.

The committee was called to order by Jason R. Kees (IL), Deputy Director, Americanism Division. The committee organized by electing Richard W. Anderson (CT), Chairman and Charles T. Tucker (GA), Secretary. A motion was made to empower the chairman and secretary to sign the convention committee report. The motion was approved.

The Convention Committee on Americanism then recessed so the subcommittees could convene to consider their assigned resolutions.
The Americanism Convention Subcommittee convened in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Rooms 202 and 203, Second Floor. Richard W. Anderson (CT) was elected chairman and Charles Tucker (GA) was elected secretary.

A discussion ensued regarding professional athletes standing for the National Anthem. A motion was made to refer the subject to the standing Americanism Commission for further discussion during the fall meeting. The motion carried.

The Children & Youth Convention Subcommittee convened in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Room 212, Second Floor. Herbert J. Petit, Jr. (LA) was elected chairman and Donald Suchy (NE) was elected secretary.

The subcommittees considered 36 resolutions and their dispositions are as follows:

Approved

Resolution No. 290: Honoring the Anniversary of “In God We Trust”
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The Preamble to our American Legion’s Constitution begins with the sentence, “For God and Country”; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always begun all official meetings with a prayer, and closed them with a benediction; and

WHEREAS, Through the history of our nation, there are numerous references to biblical quotations throughout our federal government buildings including the White House, Senate Chamber, House Chamber, Supreme Court and every state in the union can attest to the same in their respective buildings; and

WHEREAS, An act of Congress on April 22, 1864, formally put the motto on coins, having first appeared on the short lived two cent bronze piece coined in May 1864; and

WHEREAS, By 1866, “In God We Trust” was appearing on the $5, $10 and $20 dollar gold pieces, the 5 cent piece, the 25 cent piece, the 50 cent piece and $1 dollar silver piece; and

WHEREAS, In 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law specifying “that at such a time as new dies for printing currency are adopted, the dies shall bear the inscription “In God We Trust” and thereafter the inscription shall appear on all United States currency and coins”; and

WHEREAS, Our nation’s history and heritage is rooted in religious significances from our Constitution to the swearing in of those who currently lead our Nation with their hand on the Bible; and

WHEREAS, The founding fathers based their way of life on religious convictions; and

WHEREAS, There is an old adage soldiers knew that states “There are no atheists in a fox hole”; and

WHEREAS, Throughout our nation’s history where we experienced a declaration of war, a conflict or tragedy or national disaster, every leader’s speech has referenced “God” in making their address; and

WHEREAS, In this day and age with its seemingly ever increasing senseless acts having no real rationale, we need to recognize the importance of keeping and honoring “In God We Trust” in our lives from birth to death; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the honoring of our nation’s motto “In God We Trust” by encouraging the posting of “In God We Trust” as our national motto in public and private spaces; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion honor July 30 as National Motto Day, upon which special attention is called to the history and heritage of “In God We Trust”; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, The American Legion support legislation to recognize and honor the anniversary of the motto.

Resolution No. 291: School Prayer
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, Americans have historically believed in seeking God's protection and guidance through prayer; and
WHEREAS, The value of expressing spiritual convictions through public prayer has been recognized as a firm basis on which to conduct public proceedings; and
WHEREAS, Supreme Court decisions during the early 1960's have had the effect of severely restricting the practice of any manner of public prayer even though these decisions simply addressed prescribed or compulsory prayer; and
WHEREAS, This restriction is most evident in our nation's public schools where a concurrent moral and spiritual decline is clearly manifested; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion reaffirms its support for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that would permit voluntary prayer in public buildings, including public schools and at other public gatherings; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress pass legislation to promote the concept of school prayer in order to ensure that our nation's public school children have a daily opportunity to pray.

Resolution No. 292: Return Patriotic Holidays to Traditional Dates
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The dates of certain patriotic holidays have been changed from their original dates to create "three-day weekends"; and
WHEREAS, The time-honored traditional observances of these holidays has been eroded; and
WHEREAS, The majority of Americans view Memorial Day as a time for relaxation and leisure recreation rather than as a solemn occasion and a time to reflect and pay tribute to the American servicemen and women who sacrificed their lives in defense of our nation; and
WHEREAS, By urging the ringing of bells in our communities for one minute on traditional Memorial Day, May 30, will help Americans to realize that the true purpose of this day is to pay tribute to those who have given so much for their country; and
WHEREAS, Our hope for the future has been made possible because our servicemen and women have made sacrifices in order to secure freedom for America and the ringing of community bells is a fitting way to observe traditional Memorial Day in the years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion calls upon the Congress of the United States to restore the official observance of Lincoln’s Birthday to February 12, Washington's Birthday to February 22, Memorial Day to May 30 and Columbus Day to October 12 each year; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the passage of federal legislation that would result in an annual presidential proclamation calling on all American institutions, public and private, to toll their bells for one minute, beginning at 11:00
Proceedings of Wednesday, August 31, 2016

a.m. on the traditional Memorial Day, May 30, in remembrance of the servicemen and women who died defending our nation and our freedom.

Resolution No. 293: Oppose Importation of Foreign Manufactured American Flags
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The United States has been losing most of its manufacturing capabilities to foreign countries; and
WHEREAS, The United States government recognized the importance of stimulating the economy in order to capture some of the jobs lost to foreign competitors; and
WHEREAS, The manufacture and use of foreign made American flags has flooded every sector of American life; and
WHEREAS, The American people must be made aware of how they can help themselves to restore the economic success they have enjoyed in the past; and
WHEREAS, The Massachusetts legislature passed a law, in 2014, that all states agencies will purchase American made flags; and
WHEREAS, American flags made overseas are prohibited at U.S. military bases around the world under new rules from the Department of Defense, in 2015; now, therefore,
be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge all government agencies at the local, state and federal levels to ensure that all American flags purchased for use by these agencies be American made; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion embark upon a program to urge the American public to buy American made flags for their personal use and for the use of their community, fraternal, religious and social organizations.

Resolution No. 294: Boy Scouts of America and the Department of Defense
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The Eighty-Second National Convention of The American Legion in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, passed Resolution 334 titled “Support of Boy Scouts of America” which reiterated The American Legion’s longstanding support of the Boy Scouts of America; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion, as chartered by the United States Congress, pledges to “transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy”; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion endorses the concept that the perpetuation of these principles may best be initiated by an enlightened public achieved through the implementation of educational practices offered in the homes, in our schools and through public-wide programs organized and developed for this purpose by organizations like the Boy Scouts of America; and
WHEREAS, Scouting programs instill in youth the values found in the Scout Oath and Scout Law, which are relevant in helping youth grow to their full potential though the academic, self-confidence, ethics, leadership, and citizenship skills that will influence their adults lives; and
WHEREAS, Members of the United States Armed Forces embody leadership, citizenship and patriotism, serving as positive role-models for young people; and
WHEREAS, The chartering of Boy Scout units by components of the active duty military, National Guard and reserve units provides military servicemembers an avenue for active engagement with the local community and its youth; and
WHEREAS, On November 15, 2004, in response to a lawsuit brought by the ACLU of Illinois, the Department of Defense (DOD) ceased the direct sponsorship of Boy Scout units on military facilities and chartering of Boy Scout units by DOD components; and

WHEREAS, DOD Instruction 1015.09 of January 19, 2016, outlines the fiscal and logistical support that the DOD may provide to qualified scouting organizations operating on military installations overseas but does not authorize chartering of Boy Scout units by DOD components; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion express its steadfast opposition to Department of Defense policies that prohibit the chartering of Boy Scout units by components of the Armed Forces of the United States of America; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion use every executive, legislative and judicial avenue available to restore longstanding policies of cooperation between the Department of Defense and the Boy Scouts of America that will allow Boy Scout units the right to authorize components of the active duty military, National Guard and reserve units to charter Boy Scout units without fear of legal reprisal.

Resolution No. 295: Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, Since the earliest days of our republic, Congress has exercised its constitutional power to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization; and

WHEREAS, The Rules of Naturalization, as established by Congress, requires an oath of allegiance and renunciation of all prior allegiances as a condition of naturalization; and

WHEREAS, The Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance serves as a contract between the applicant for citizenship and the United States government in which the applicant, in return for the benefits and privileges received, agrees to:

1. Renounce all allegiance to any foreign state or sovereignties
2. Support and defend the U.S. Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, both foreign and domestic
3. Bear “true faith and allegiance” to the United States of America
4. Bear arms, perform noncombatant service, or perform work of national importance on behalf of the United States of America when required by law
5. Take this oath without mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that naturalization is a privilege, not a right, to be granted only in accordance with the conditions established by the Congress; and

WHEREAS, In taking the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance, the immigrant pledges to transfer their full political allegiance from his or her birth nation to the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, According to immigration experts, the great majority of immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship come from countries that “allow or encourage multiple citizenship”; and

WHEREAS, Many immigrant-sending countries, including Mexico, are actively promoting dual allegiance; and

WHEREAS, To retain allegiance to another constitution besides the U.S. Constitution, is inconsistent with the moral and philosophical foundations of American constitutional democracy, thus violating our core principles as outlined in the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance; and

WHEREAS, The integrity of the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance and the integrity of the entire citizenship naturalization process are challenged or compromised by
the continuing increase in the number of U.S. citizens who hold multiple national allegiances; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion opposes any and all changes to the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance, as used in naturalization ceremonies, that would dilute or eliminate any of the following important and necessary elements of the oath:

1. Renunciation of all allegiances to foreign states or sovereignties
2. Support for and defense of the U.S. Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic
3. Bear ‘true faith and allegiance’ to the United States of America
4. Bear arms, perform noncombatant service, or perform work of national importance on behalf of the United States of America
5. Take this oath without mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to prescribe the language that is used in the oath of renunciation and allegiance for purposes as outlined in the Immigration and Nationality Act; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the Congress of the United States to enact measures to prevent dual citizenship by naturalized U.S. citizens.

Resolution No. 296: Support Fairness for Immigrant Spouses
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The American Legion was founded by veterans who were concerned about the welfare of dependents of servicemen and women killed as a result of their service in World War I; and

WHEREAS, Current immigration law requires an immigrant spouse to be married to a citizen of the United States for two years before proceeding with a petition for legal permanent resident status; and

WHEREAS, The immigrant spouse’s petition for permanent legal residence is canceled when the citizen spouse dies before the two-year threshold is reached; and

WHEREAS, Current law allows immigrant spouses of U.S. military personnel who die in combat or as a result of combat to continue their original petition for permanent resident status; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is committed to caring for the families of the servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in the furtherance of the interests of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow immigrant spouses of U.S. military personnel who die in training on military installations to continue their petition for permanent resident status without the current two-year eligibility restriction; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Immigration and Nationality Act be amended to waive the fees for posthumous citizenship assessed to surviving family members who lose a relative in hostile combat while a member of the U.S. Armed Forces and who has a pending application for United States citizenship.

Resolution No. 297: Conscientious Objectors Tax Diversion
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The Constitution of the United States of America provides for the common defense of all citizens; and
WHEREAS, The freedoms we enjoy and the security of our nation that we desire rests on the individual determination of each of us to help preserve it; and
WHEREAS, Legislation has been introduced in the Congress that would allow conscientious objectors to elect to have their income, estate or gift tax be used for non-military purposes; and
WHEREAS, Implementation of such a practice could affect military strength and national security; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to oppose legislation that would give conscientious objectors a voice in diverting monies from military spending.

Resolution No. 298: English Language be Declared as the Official United States Language
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 248 (IL))
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who come from many ethnic backgrounds and who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, The United States has over its many year history been a haven and in most cases a new home for people from all over the world; and
WHEREAS, These Americans, although keeping their ethnic background alive, were urged to take advantage of our free educational system that taught them the English language, American history and civics; and
WHEREAS, Many permanent residents and new citizens, although clinging to their ethnic backgrounds did with pride and determination take advantage of learning English; and
WHEREAS, Bilingual programs funded by the Department of Education are designed to teach with the primary instruction in the student’s home language, while English is subjected to a secondary status; and
WHEREAS, These programs tend to encourage separatism, rather than a unification of purpose; and
WHEREAS, There exists alternative bilingual education programs which provide a more efficient transition to proficiency in the English language; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall sponsor and encourage legislation which would establish English as the official national language; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to encourage and fund alternative bilingual education programs to serve, as was intended, as a short intermediate step to achieve proficiency in the English language.

Resolution No. 299: Pledge of Allegiance
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, In October 1970, The American Legion’s National Executive Committee passed Resolution 13 titled “Defense and Respect for the United States Flag,” that voiced The American Legion’s support for continuing the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in the nation’s public schools; and
WHEREAS, In recent years, several states have passed legislation to encourage and authorize the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in the schools within their state; and

WHEREAS, In 1954, The Congress of the United States reaffirmed the influence on government by a supreme power when it revised the Pledge of Allegiance by inserting the words “under God” as follows:

“I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”; and

WHEREAS, Liberal judicial opinions and media coverage have questioned the propriety of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools in the United States, citing the unconstitutionality in references to God; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion, the Congress of the United States and many other groups and organizations open their regular meetings by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion reiterate its continuing support for the Pledge of Allegiance in its current form, voicing opposition to any and all attempts to revise it beyond the version approved by Congress in 1954; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the nation’s schools to include the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by teachers and students in regular school activities and events; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion, at all levels, continue its unyielding support for the Pledge of Allegiance and its provisions of national loyalty by using all means practical to inform Americans about the belief in and the reliance in God by our nation’s founders in forming our democratic republic.

Resolution No. 300: Star Spangled Banner
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The Star Spangled Banner became our National Anthem on March 3, 1931, when President Herbert Hoover signed Public Law 823; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that many millions of Americans cherish and respect the currently accepted version, both words and music, of “The Star Spangled Banner,” such version being the “Service Version” prepared in 1918 by the War Department for use in Army and Navy song books; and

WHEREAS, It has become customary and traditional to sing or play “The Star Spangled Banner” before sporting events and other large gatherings of people in this country in a traditional manner reflecting a solemn pride, dignity and respect; and

WHEREAS, Many American Legionnaires have been offended by disrespectful and unconventional playing and singing of the National Anthem at sporting events; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion, by action of the 78th National Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, went on record supporting establishment of a national day of observance for “The Star Spangled Banner”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourage and recommend the playing of the National Anthem at all sporting events and that it be performed in its original customary and traditional rendition; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge radio and television networks and stations to desist from pre-empting with commercial advertisements the singing and playing of our National Anthem and the raising and/or lowering of our Flag; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion is opposed to any changes in the words and music of the National Anthem as adopted under Public Law 823 of the 71st Congress; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion promote the establishment of March 3 of each year as a national day of observance for “The Star Spangled Banner” and that the patriotic observance of this day stress the origin of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

Resolution No. 301: Eliminate Damages and Attorney Fees in Establishment Clause Lawsuits
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The American Legion, whose motto is “For God and Country” and has been since its founding by veterans of World War I in 1919, is leading a nationwide effort to combat the secular cleansing of our American heritage through Establishment Clause lawsuits; and

WHEREAS, Many Americans mistakenly believe that the words “separation of church and state” are included in the Constitution of the United States and provide the legal basis for removal of symbols with a religious aspect or references to God in our National Motto or to our country’s founders’ reliance on God, from veterans memorials, and other public lands, areas, monuments, buildings, seals or ceremonies; and

WHEREAS, The First Amendment to the Constitution nowhere in fact mentions “separation of church and state,” nor “separation of state from religion,” but states only: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”; and

WHEREAS, Judges in increasing numbers have issued orders in Establishment Clause cases that ban the Boy Scouts, ban the Ten Commandments, ban religious symbols at veterans memorials, ban the Pledge of Allegiance, ban historical religious symbols in the official seals of counties, and ban cities and the Department of Defense from assisting the Boy Scouts, and judges in such cases have awarded millions of dollars to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and others in attorney fees to be paid by taxpayers as authorized by 42 U.S. Code Section 1988, the Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S. Code Section 2412, and/or other federal statutes; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that all federal statutes of the United States should be amended to rescind and repeal the authority Congress gave the courts to impose damages or attorney fees in Establishment Clause cases, as the threat of judge-ordered damages or attorney fees is being used as a club to compel local elected bodies, villages, towns, cities, counties, school boards and state and federal agencies, to surrender to demands to remove or destroy symbols or expressions of a religious aspect from all areas of the public sphere for fear of imposition of damages or attorney fees to be paid by taxpayers, and is being used to chill private citizens from exercising the First Amendment right to seek redress by entering Establishment Clause lawsuits to defend symbols of and references to our American heritage, for fear that damages or attorney fees will be imposed upon them personally; and

WHEREAS, The 86th National Convention of The American Legion, August 31 – September 1, 2, 2004, passed Resolution 326, titled “Preserve WWI Veterans Memorial in Mojave Desert”, which called on Congress to amend the Civil Rights Attorney Fees Act of 1976, 42 U.S. Code Section 1988, to prohibit the courts from awarding attorney fees under that statute in lawsuits brought to remove or destroy religious symbols; and

which called on Congress to amend 28 U.S. Code Section 2412, or any other similar federal statute, to limit remedies to declaratory and injunctive relief only and to eliminate court-ordered attorney fee awards in cases brought under the Establishment of Religion Clause of the U.S. Constitution; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Congress of the United States to amend the Civil Rights Attorney Fees Act of 1976, 42 U.S. Code Section 1988, the Equal access to Justice Act, 28 U.S. Code 2412, and any and all other federal statutes, to limit remedies to injunctive relief and declaratory relief only, and to rescind the authority of the courts to award attorney fees to the prevailing party in lawsuits brought under the Establishment of Religion Clause in the U.S. Constitution.

Resolution No. 302: Oppose Flag Code Changes for Hoisting, Lowering or Passing of the Flag, The National Anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance

Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The American Legion is recognized as one of the country’s foremost authorities on the proper display of the United States flag; and

WHEREAS, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 9, United States Code previously stated, “During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review, all persons present except those in uniform should face the flag and stand at attention with the right hand over the heart. Those present in uniform should render the military salute. When not in uniform, men should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Aliens should stand at attention. The salute to the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.”; and

WHEREAS, Title 36, Chapter 3, Section 301, United States Code previously stated, “During a rendition of the National Anthem when the flag is displayed all present except those in uniform should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart; men not in uniform should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold the headdress at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart; and individuals in uniform should give the military salute at the first note of the anthem and maintain that position until the last note.”; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 110-181, 110th Congress, amended Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 9, United States Code to read: “During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review, those present in uniform should render the military salute. Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present, but not in uniform, may render the military salute. All other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Citizens of other countries should stand at attention. All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.”; and

WHEREAS, Public Law 110-417, 110th Congress amended Title 36, Chapter 3, Section 301, United States Code to read: “During a rendition of the national anthem when the flag is displayed individuals in uniform should give the military salute at the first note of the anthem and maintain that position until the last note; members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute in the manner provided for individuals in uniform; and all other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, and men not in uniform, if applicable, should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart”; and
WHEREAS, Public Law 113-66, 113th Congress amended Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 4, United States Code to read: The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: “I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”, should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. When not in uniform men should remove any non-religious headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute. Members of the Armed Forces not in uniform and veterans may render the military salute in the manner provided for persons in uniform.;

and

WHEREAS, The American Legion appreciates the sincere intent of the current law to recognize all veterans by authorizing the military salute as an option to the traditional means of honoring the flag by placing the right hand over the heart; and

WHEREAS, Military regulations were affected, which previously specified that members not in uniform face the flag and stand at attention with the right hand over the heart, if covered, men shall remove the headdress and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart; and

WHEREAS, The sentence "Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present, but not in uniform, may render the military salute," raises the concern that Legionnaires, while wearing a baseball cap or other casual headdress would render a military salute; and

WHEREAS, The non-veteran public may soon follow the lead of those veterans and render the military salute as the flag is hoisted, lowered, is passing, during a rendition of the national anthem when the flag is displayed or during the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That those sections of the U.S. Flag Code prescribing that members of the Armed Forces and veterans out of uniform may render the military salute during hoisting, lowering or passing of the United States flag, during a rendition of the national anthem when the flag is displayed, or during the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance causes confusion leading to breaches of flag etiquette, to include proper conduct during the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to repeal that portion of Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 9, United States Code permitting members of the Armed Forces and veterans out of uniform to render a military salute during hoisting, lowering, or passing of the United States flag; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to repeal that portion of Title 36, Chapter 3, Section 301, United States Code permitting members of the Armed Forces and veterans out of uniform to render a military salute during a rendition of the national anthem when the flag is displayed; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage the Congress of the United States to repeal that portion of Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 4, United States Code permitting members of the Armed Forces not in uniform and veterans to render the military salute in the manner provided for persons in uniform during recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Resolution No. 303: Constitutional Amendment to Protect the Flag of the United States
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The American Legion has campaigned diligently for the passage of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to protect the symbol of our nation, the Flag of the United States, from physical desecration; and

WHEREAS, Part of that campaign has included the founding of The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc., a coalition of civic, veteran, business and fraternal organizations which have come together to persuade Congress to propose a flag amendment; and

WHEREAS, The legislatures of all 50 states have indicated by memorial resolutions to the U.S. Congress that such an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is needed in view of the 1989 decision of the United States Supreme Court (Texas v. Johnson) that invalidated all flag protection laws; and

WHEREAS, Surveys have shown that over 80% of the American people support the passage of a flag amendment; and

WHEREAS, Flag protection amendments have passed the House of Representatives six times previously, only to fall short of the necessary two-thirds supermajority required in the Senate; and

WHEREAS, Since the time of the American Revolution millions of men and women have proudly defended our country under the “Stars & Stripes” and, as a last gesture of gratitude this emblem of our country is placed upon the coffin of veterans as a token of respect for services rendered to a grateful nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion continue to urge the Congress of the United States to propose and approve an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the Flag of the United States; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continue its efforts through affiliation with The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. to bring to a successful conclusion the grassroots campaign to amend the Constitution of the United States of America in order to return to the people their right to protect the flag from acts of physical desecration.

Resolution No. 278: Financially Assist Families Faced by Catastrophic Illness of Their Children
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, A catastrophic illness is any illness or condition, acute or chronic, for which expenses are incurred that are not fully covered by a private insurer, federal or state health care assistance, or other financial resource; and

WHEREAS, When a child becomes ill or disabled, the cost of medical care alone can be catastrophic for the family; and

WHEREAS, Families of any income level may be faced with high uncovered medical expenses for their children; and

WHEREAS, Families with or without insurance are vulnerable to extraordinary medical bills; and

WHEREAS, Several states have enacted legislation to establish Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds to help families bear the excessive financial burdens associated with the care of children with special health care needs and disabilities; and

WHEREAS, These funds have been proven effective and are designed to act as a safety net for families from all walks of life who have excessive expenses related to a child’s medical needs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the federal government to expand the present federal Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant programs to include catastrophic illness; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That department and post leadership are encouraged to urge state governments to enact legislation to assist financially those individual families faced by the catastrophic illness of their children in order to maintain the integrity of the family.

Resolution No. 279: Support Funding Comprehensive Health Care for Children and Youth
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The American Legion has and will continue to do everything possible to ensure that every child has a home, health, education, character, and opportunity; and
WHEREAS, Since its inception, the Maternal and Child Health Services Title V Block Grant has provided a foundation for ensuring the health of our Nation’s mothers and children; and
WHEREAS, The Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant has operated as a federal-state partnership for more than 81 years; and
WHEREAS, When the Social Security Act was passed in 1935, the federal government, through Title V, pledged its support of state efforts to extend and improve health and welfare services for mothers and children; and
WHEREAS, Title V funds are used by states and jurisdictions to implement a wide range of maternal and child health care programs (assessment, diagnosis and treatment for low-income children, long-term care for special needs children, rehabilitation services for blind and disabled children, prenatal care for women and childhood immunization) and to develop comprehensive, family-centered, systems of care for children with special health care needs; and
WHEREAS, These programs are dependent upon the annual appropriation of funds by the Congress of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion affirms its support of the programs as outlined by the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant contained under Title V of the Social Security Act and urges the Congress to appropriate funds that meet or exceed current funding levels, to include all programs related to the comprehensive health care for children & youth.

Resolution No. 280: Funding for Drug Trafficking Prevention Programs
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The illegal trafficking of drugs into the United States is one of the greatest threats to the welfare and safety of our citizens, particularly our youth; and
WHEREAS, The enemies of our nation and way of life hope to destroy us from within by debilitating our most precious resource for the future, our youth; and
WHEREAS, The economic and social costs of drug abuse exceed $180 billion annually; and
WHEREAS, The efforts to halt the entry of such illegal drugs may be seen as a war of will and resources – a war that at the present we are not winning; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the President and the Congress of the United States to appropriate funds that meet or exceed current funding levels for state, federal, and military drug trafficking prevention programs.

Resolution No. 281: Prevention of Child Sexual Exploitation
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The sexual victimization of children is overwhelming in magnitude, yet largely unrecognized and underreported; and
WHEREAS, Statistics show that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of 18; and
WHEREAS, Nearly 70 percent of all reported sexual assaults occur to children ages 17 and under and it is believed that as many as 73 percent of children do not report the abuse for at least one year and 45 percent do not report their abuse for 5 years or more; and
WHEREAS, The widespread use of the Internet to sexually victimize children presents an even broader threat to the safety of children; and
WHEREAS, According to Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, one in seven children receive unwanted sexual solicitations online and one in three children are exposed to unwanted sexually explicit material; and
WHEREAS, By far the most prevalent exploitive act reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is the production and distribution of pornographic images of children; and
WHEREAS, The lives of the children featured in these illegal images are forever altered, not only by the exploitation itself, but by the permanent record of it; and
WHEREAS, The impact of these terrible acts can devastate families and put children at risk of depression, disassociation, and post-traumatic stress – symptoms that can last well into adulthood; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support appropriate legislation aimed at the prevention, investigation and prosecution of child sexual exploitation; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion be authorized to collaborate with national and state agencies and organizations involved in the prevention of child sexual exploitation as determined by the Americanism Commission to the end that The American Legion can maintain an effective role in preventing child sexual exploitation; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That departments and posts are encouraged to actively raise community awareness about the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children and are encouraged to cooperate with law enforcement agencies, government entities and public/private organizations that seek to empower the public to take immediate and direct action to enforce a zero tolerance policy regarding child sexual exploitation.

Resolution No. 282: Oppose any Attempt to Weaken Present Laws Governing Penalties for the Production, Sale and Distribution of Pornographic or Obscene Materials to Minors

Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, Since 1960, The American Legion has maintained a position of complete opposition to the production, sale and distribution of pornographic or obscene materials to minors (defined as children under 18 years old); and
WHEREAS, Present laws forbid the production, sale and distribution of pornographic materials to minors; and
WHEREAS, Any attempt to eliminate such protective laws from state and/or federal criminal codes would have a negative impact on our youth and society in general; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly opposes any attempt to weaken our present laws governing the penalties for the production, sale and distribution of pornographic or obscene materials to minors.
Resolution No. 283: Establish “National Family Week”
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, One of the principles guiding The American Legion's children & youth programs is to maintain the integrity of the family unit; and
WHEREAS, The family unit is the center of our affections and the foundation of our American society; and
WHEREAS, No institution can take the family unit's place in giving meaning to human life and stability in our society; and
WHEREAS, It is fitting that official recognition be given to the importance of strengthening family life; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the President of the United States and the Congress to establish "National Family Week" during Thanksgiving Holiday Week as an annual observance.

Resolution No. 284: Locate Missing Children and Prevent Child Victimization
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, Each day in the United States, an average of 2,191 children, 17 years and younger, are reported missing or disappear by abduction, run away or are lost to some unknown cause; and
WHEREAS, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) was created in 1984 as a central resource and data clearinghouse for law enforcement, victims and their families, to aid in fighting for the safe recovery of missing children and the protection of all children from sexual exploitation; and
WHEREAS, Today more children come home safely than at any time in our nation’s history, law enforcement is better prepared, and families are more alert and aware than ever before because of the tireless work of NCMEC and law enforcement; and
WHEREAS, NCMEC’s overall recovery rate for missing children is 97 percent, demonstrating that the current system is working due to effective response of law enforcement, technological advances, and the general public paying attention to missing children photos; and
WHEREAS, Although NCMEC has made a significant impact in tackling this daunting problem, there is much that remains to be done for too many children still do not make it home, and too many are still victims of sexual predators; and
WHEREAS, Even one child disappearing is the concern of all responsible persons; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support appropriate legislation aimed at locating missing children and preventing child victimization; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to appropriate funds that meet or exceed current funding levels for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion be authorized to collaborate with national and state missing and exploited children agencies and organizations as determined by the Americanism Commission to the end that The American Legion can maintain an effective role, at all levels, in locating missing children and preventing child exploitation; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That the departments and posts are encouraged to actively increase the public’s awareness of child victimization and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society and are urged to cooperate with credible
organizations and agencies that seek to locate missing children in their states and communities.

Resolution No. 285: National School Lunch Program
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, There has been as expression of concern by health authorities and various national organizations with an interest in the status of proper nutrition among young people; and
WHEREAS, The National School Lunch Program and other federally-supported nutrition programs for children have demonstrated their effectiveness as evidenced by the reduction of health problems and improved performance among children; and
WHEREAS, In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, more than 30.5 million children each day got their lunch through the National School Lunch Program; and
WHEREAS, The National School Lunch Program cost $16.9 billion in FY 2015; and
WHEREAS, Since 1941, The American Legion has supported the National School Lunch Program and other related programs of nutrition for children; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That Congress appropriate funds at or exceeding current funding levels for the National School Lunch Program.

Resolution No. 286: Prevent Child Maltreatment
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism
WHEREAS, The American Legion has, since its inception, voiced and demonstrated active concern about the health and welfare of children; and
WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau reported that in 2014 that an estimated 3.2 million cases of child maltreatment were reported to child protective service agencies and 702,000 cases of child maltreatment were substantiated; and
WHEREAS, The federal government defines child abuse and neglect in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 2010 as “Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act, which presents an imminent risk of serious harm”; and
WHEREAS, According to CAPTA, child maltreatment encompasses physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and psychological maltreatment; and
WHEREAS, All responsible citizens have a valuable role to play in building strong communities in which families and children are valued and supported, and in which children are safe from all forms of maltreatment; and
WHEREAS, There are concerned adults who care about this problem and will work to combat its degenerative effect on our society; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, The American Legion support appropriate legislation aimed at preventing child maltreatment; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion be authorized to collaborate with national and state child maltreatment prevention organizations as determined by the Americanism Commission to the end that The American Legion can maintain an effective role in the promotion of child maltreatment prevention programs; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That departments and posts are urged to cooperate in all ways possible with organizations and agencies that advocate for child maltreatment prevention and are urged to promote and increase the public’s awareness of child
maltreatment and its detrimental effects on the children and youth of our society; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges all educators, coaches, school administrators and all others responsible for children in any capacity to familiarize themselves with the warning signs of all forms of child maltreatment and report any suspected maltreatment to the proper authorities and ensure that these children are referred to the appropriate child protective service in their community; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That all levels of The American Legion are urged through its Children & Youth programs, to educate the public of their obligations and duties with respect to reporting suspected cases of child maltreatment.

Resolution No. 287: Programs and Organizations that Promote Child Safety
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, unintentional injury remains the leading cause of death among children ages 17 and under in the United States; and

WHEREAS, In 2010, every day, more than 22,770 children ages 17 and under were injured seriously enough to require medical treatment, totaling more than 8.3 million children each year; and

WHEREAS, The leading cause of death among children ages 17 and under are unintentional injuries; and

WHEREAS, A combination of education, environmental improvements, engineering modifications, enactment and enforcement of legislation and regulations, economic incentives, community empowerment and program evaluation is effective at reducing the incidence and severity of unintentional death and disability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support appropriate legislation aimed at preventing or reducing unintentional injury among children and adolescents; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion is authorized to collaborate with the leading national safety organizations as determined by the Americanism Commission to the end that The American Legion can maintain an effective role in the promotion of adequate child safety programs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That departments and posts are encouraged to actively raise the public’s awareness on organized safety commissions and are urged to actively promote child safety at the state and local levels.

Resolution No. 288: Reducing or Preventing Teenage Pregnancy
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The American Legion has long been concerned with the health and quality of life issues surrounding its young people; and

WHEREAS, Despite declines since 1991, the United States has a significantly higher teen birth rate than any other developed nation; and

WHEREAS, In 2014, approximately 249,078 births occurred among teens ages 15-19; and

WHEREAS, Childbearing has adverse consequences for teenage mothers and particularly for their children, contributing directly to mothers and their children being poorly educated, unmarried and lacking job skills; and
WHEREAS, The offspring of teen mothers have high rates of illness, mortality, educational and emotional problems and often are the victims of child abuse at the hands of parents too immature to understand their baby's needs; and

WHEREAS, Preventing teen pregnancy is an effective way to address a range of other pressing social issues including poverty, child and family well-being, responsible fatherhood, workforce development and out-of-wedlock childbearing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support appropriate legislation aimed at reducing or preventing teen pregnancy; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion is authorized to collaborate with national and state teen pregnancy prevention organizations as determined by the Americanism Commission to the end that The American Legion can maintain an effective role in the promotion of adequate teen pregnancy prevention programs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That departments and posts are encouraged to actively raise the public’s awareness about organizations and agencies that seek to educate teenagers on the advantages of delaying pregnancy.

Resolution No. 289: Support for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Origin: Convention Committee on Americanism
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Americanism

WHEREAS, The Americanism Commission is vitally concerned about the violent crimes committed by juveniles in this nation each year; and

WHEREAS, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is organized: to develop and encourage the implementation of national standards for the administration of juvenile justice; to assist state and local governments in removing juveniles from jails and lockups for adults; to develop and implement effective methods of preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency, including methods with specific focus on maintaining and strengthening the family unit so that juveniles may be retained in their homes; to develop effective programs to prevent delinquency; to divert juveniles from traditional juvenile justice systems and to provide critically needed alternatives to institutionalization; and to coordinate all federal juvenile delinquency programs and all federal programs related to missing and exploited children; and

WHEREAS, The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention program now promoted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has proved effective in many states; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and its programs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the President and Congress meet or exceed current funding levels for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Referred to the Standing Americanism Commission

Resolution No. 157 (MD): Establishment of a National Day of Remembrance in Honor of Our Cold War Veterans and Their Families
Resolution No. 190 (WA): Ashes to Graves Flag Disposal (Consolidated with Resolution No. 167 (ID))
Resolution No. 191 (WA) American Legion Scouting Advisory Council (Consolidated
Resolution No. 198 (MS): Change in National Oratorical Contest Format
Resolution No. 233 (FL): Eagle Scout Lapel Pin Award
Resolution No. 240 (AZ): Proposed Change to the Junior Air Rifle National Championships
Resolution No. 241 (AZ): Develop a Recognition Program for the Boy Scouts of America Venturing Program

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Commander. As a delegate from Connecticut, I move for the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I have a motion. Do we have a second? …Second. Is there any discussion? All in favor so indicate by the usual sign. All opposed? The report of Americanism is adopted.

Having completed the adoption of the Americanism report, it is appropriate to announce the winners of two Americanism awards.

Frank N. Belgrano, Jr. Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Frank Belgrano Jr., was a National Commander from 1934-1935. He was a founder of the Galileo Post in San Francisco and was the department commander of California during a peak year for membership and activity in the Golden State. The Frank Belgrano, Jr., Trophy is given annually to the department rendering the most outstanding service to the Boys Scout of America program during the 12-month period beginning August 1. This year's winner is the Department of New York. (Applause)

Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: It is only fitting that our education award be named after a national commander who graduated from Harvard Law School and interrupted his term as a county attorney in Kansas so he could serve in World War I. The Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy is given to the department within the United States documenting the greatest activity in operating The American Legion School Medal Program. The winning department shows what can be accomplished by an active and involved American Legion. This year's winner is the department of Colorado. (Applause)

Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: In 1952, Department Commander Dr. Garland D. Murphy, Jr., of Arkansas, came to The American Legion with an offer to provide a valuable contribution to be used solely for children. After much study and discussion, the idea of a foundation was adopted. Eventually, on October 15, 1953, the National Executive Committee approved the establishment of the foundation and entered into a trust agreement with Dr. Murphy. Legal work was completed, and on July 9, 1954, the foundation was duly incorporated under the laws of the State of Indiana. At that time, Dr. Murphy assigned to the foundation deeds to fractional mineral rights on nearly 10,000 acres of land in the oil-rich Williston Basin in Montana and North Dakota.

To date, more than $14 million has been awarded to organizations to assist the children of this country from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc. I now have the pleasure of presenting the Garland D. Murphy, Jr., Award to the department that raised the most money for the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year.
Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to present this award to the Department of Florida. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The Garland D. Murphy, Jr., Award, presented by the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to The American Legion Department of Florida for the program year 2015-2016. In recognition of their designation as the number one department, in total contributions received from their volunteers, in support of our annual program designed to meet the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of our nation’s children through productive and meaningful grants. (Applause)

U. S. “Udie” Grant Legacy Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: It is now time for me to present the U.S. “Udie” Grant Legacy Award. Udie was a member of the National Executive Committee for 38 years from the Department of Kansas. He also served as a longtime director and later president of our National Child Welfare Foundation until he joined Post Everlasting in 2004. The Udie Grant Legacy Award recognizes the collective efforts of an American Legion Family in a department. It goes to the department that collectively raises the most money for the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year. The winner of this prestigious award is the Department of Florida. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The U.S. “Udie” Grant Legacy Award, presented by the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to the Department of Florida for the program year 2015-2016 in recognition of Outstanding Support for The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. We thank you.

DELEGATE BOLAND (FL): Commander Barnett, on behalf of the Board of Directors of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, it's indeed an honor to present you with a five diamond Child Welfare lapel pin.

One other thing, commander, I know you won't be around as a commander next year, but I understand there's a rumor going that if The American Legion Family raises a million dollars for the Child Welfare Foundation, the president will have his head shaven. I'm looking for a volunteer, commander, because I know you're going to be a little light on work next year. (Laughter)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: You got it. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. At this time, if anyone has donations to the Child Welfare Foundation, I will now accept those on stage. I now ask National Vice Commander George Cushing to assume duties at the chair. ... At this time, National Vice Commander Cushing assumed the Chair.

Donations to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): Round Rock, Texas, Post 447, $1,000.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NE): From the great state of Nebraska, $1,081.73. Go, Cornhuskers.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): From the Department of Ohio, the Buckeye State and your host for this convention, $2,000, Child Welfare.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): From the Department of Missouri, the Show-Me State and home of a great Legionnaire, Harry S. Truman, $321.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NH): From the Department of New Hampshire, the Granite State, a donation of $1,500.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): From the Department of North Dakota, $1,500.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): From the Legion Family of the great and friendly state of Arizona, $1,000.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): From John Ivens Post 42, Grand Canyon, Arizona, $500.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OR): From the beautiful state of Oregon, an additional $175.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): From the Department of Idaho and the Sons of the American Legion, an amount of $1,500.
DELEGATE STREY (WI): Department of Wisconsin, Vice Commander Tom Strey along with Department Vice Commander Frank Kostka, we have a donation for the fund.
DELEGATE SCHREIBER (CA): Les Schreiber, District 13, San Jose, California, donation of $1,830.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): Post 24. I'm here with our freshly baked commander, Cheri Stanton. From the great 19th District of the Department of Illinois, $524.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MA): From the great state of Massachusetts, and Department Commander Kenneth Starks, we'd like to present $500. (Applause)

… National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The American Legion has supported Scouting since our organization’s founding in 1919. American Legion posts sponsor thousands of Scouting units serving more than 60,000 young people nationwide. The chief scout executive earned a degree in youth agency administration from Salem College in West Virginia. As the Boy Scouts of America’s top professional, he supports the work of its National Executive Board and works directly with National President Robert Gates, and National Commissioner Tico Perez. He is the Scouting equivalent of a chief executive officer. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the chief scout executive of the Boy Scouts of America, Mike Surbaugh. (Applause)

Address: Michael B. Surbaugh
Chief Scout Executive, Boy Scouts of America

Good morning. How many people in the audience, by show of hands, had one of their children in our program or was a Scout yourself. Okay, almost everybody in the room. Well, scouts, that was truly pathetic. Good morning.

I hope that we have a few minutes to talk about something today that may be a departure from your busy agenda. I'm going to talk about some concepts of things that I think are happening with children and in education that both of us have primary concern over. And we have a long partnership and a rich and storied history together. And first let me say thank you individually to you for your service, and thank you for the incredible partnership that Scouting has had with The American Legion.

At your first National Convention, in 1919, you endorsed the Boy Scouts of America. For almost 100 years we've been partners and we've been servants to our nation's youth. We've seen lives transformed. We've seen leadership developed. We've done it together for almost a century. And today, when boys have a chance to earn the outstanding Eagle Scout Award from The American Legion and receive a scholarship, when over 60,000 young people every week go to a Legion to participate in Scouting, we've done something truly magnificent.

And I think part of the reason that that partnership has lasted so long is because the foundational elements of both the Legion and Scouting start with some very simple but very impactful words. When a boy holds his hand up like this and says, on my honor I will do my duty to God and my country, there's 40 words that start to shape values and start to impact something that the Legion has always stood for. And that's character. When Scouts say words like "trustworthy," "loyal," "helpful," "friendly," and the other points of the
Scout Oath and Law, they start to internalize a value structure that leads to character development.

And I think you could say that one could be an effective leader without good character. But it's probably not a leader that any of us would want to follow. And what Scouting and the Legion imparts through educational efforts in children is that the fundamental character competencies give you everything that you need to be an effective leader for the rest of your life.

Now, that word "character" has always kind of fascinated me. I think I heard it first when I came back from my first Boy Scout camp out. And like many of you when you have children who come home, you always ask them, "How did it go?" And my mom and dad looked at me and said, "Well, how was the campout?"

I said, "Well, we had backpacks on and it was a long hike. And it rained. And we got wet. And then we got muddy. And we pitched our tents. And my best friend, Don, had the great idea that we're going to pitch our tent on a hill so that the water would run down through the floor. Well, our tent didn't have a floor on it. So in the middle of the night we rolled out of the tent and it rained again, and we got wetter. And the next morning we were preparing our breakfast around the fire, and my former best friend, Don, kicked the eggs and bacon into the fire and we didn't have any breakfast. And then we hiked and it rained again. And we got wetter. And now I'm home." And my dad looked at me and he said, "That builds character." (Laughter)

I wasn't sure I wanted any more of that. You know, it was a little scary. And throughout my life I've heard that word bandied about, what is "character." Probably each of us would frame it a little bit differently. But most would agree we know it when we see it. It's something you can feel.

And I think that that's where we're at as a society today is we're recognizing that there's a growing character deficit in children. Because children have different pressures and stressors than many of us did. Picture a time 50 years ago what the youth landscape looked like. There were a limited number of activities in each town. You might have Little League. You might have Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts or Campfire. You might have pee wee football. But there wasn't the range of options available to children.

So what tended to happen on Saturday morning, mom or dad would send the kid out on his or her bike and say, be home for dinner. And a lot of things happened during the day, some good, maybe some not so good. But there were a number of things that happened internally with young people because they were forced to create and develop their own play. They developed structures of leadership. They learned the fundamentals of how to work with one another and be engaged in a positive activity. And then they were often connected with a positive youth development organization.

Perhaps it was Scouting. It could be 4-H. It could be YMCA. But there were things that we now know in those curriculums that lead to character. That's been studied heavily the last 10 years, and what we find is that character competencies and character attributes, they're actually formed at a much lower age level than we had always thought. Grades 1 through 5 are the prime times for character development. And I think why that's important and why we have to give that some thought, with our children and grandchildren, is you see what tends to occur today: We have fewer children participating in positive youth development activities at the teenage years. And while this hasn't been studied, what I think tends to happen is that if you picture the sports pyramid, it gets pretty narrow at the top. Only about 25 percent of kids in America will have a chance to compete at the varsity level. Now, most varsity athletes that I meet are great kids. They have some other peer associations that occur. They tend to be the popular kids. They do things that are positive. They tend to be involved at a higher degree in church activities. They have less free time to do things that may not lead to character development.

But what I think is happening is that there's such a huge emphasis now on youth sports that kids are in highly choreographed adult-led activities at younger and younger ages,
which is good. We know that sports, coupled with a positive youth development activity like Scouting, is a powerful force in bringing children up. But what I think is happening is that parents, as they start to get stressed and they have all those activities, they sit around the kitchen table and they say, you know, we can't do everything. Maybe you have to drop out of 4-H or the YMCA because the sports have become so competitive.

Well, here's what I think happens next. At age 12 or 13, when they start dropping out of those organized adult-led sporting activities they haven't learned the internal structures of how to create play in an effective way. They haven't learned peer leadership. And what we know about adolescent young men and women is that they tend not to join at that age a positive activity like YMCA, Scouting or 4-H.

So I think they drop off that sports pyramid. Now here's what's different: We can occupy every spare minute of a 12-year-old's time like this. We have a technology element that's been inserted into childhood that's taking time like never before. So what concerns me greatly as a nation, if we don't emphasize that parents have to get kids connected with activities that build character, we won't have the leaders of the future. The American Legion has helped do that for almost 100 years, and today it's more important than ever to continue and build that partnership.

Scouting has had its share of controversy over the past few years. But we're in a great place right now. Our membership nationwide is growing exponentially. People are on fire for Scouting, and I think the real underlying current is that parents recognize that character matters.

On behalf of the Boy Scouts of America I give you my sincerest thanks for this true partnership in service to our nation's youth and building character and leaders for the future. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Sir, as an ex-Scout myself, the father of a Scout, I want to present to you my medallion, our medallion from The American Legion. Of course, you hit on it in your comments: An organization for God and country and a strong, strong partnership with Boy Scouts of America from 1919 on. Thank you, sir, for your service and thank you for what you're doing for the youth of America.

Presentation: National Commander’s Media and Communications Award
ESPN, Bristol, Connecticut

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: You don’t have to be a major sports fanatic to know who “the worldwide leader in sports” is. ESPN is one of the great corporate success stories in U.S. history. It is synonymous with broadcast excellence. The American Legion is proud of our corporate association with this network.

Although American Legion Baseball is the nation’s premier youth amateur baseball league, many people don’t realize that The American Legion, which is in the program title, is indeed the same organization that is the nation’s most respected veterans service organization. Since ESPNU has been broadcasting The American Legion Baseball World Series, awareness has spread about this great program and our organization.

In addition to the Media and Communications Award, which I will present in just a second, I have this commemorative American Legion World Series jersey with the motto that I adopted from West Point: Duty. Honor. Country. (Applause)

Representing ESPN today to receive the 2016 American Legion National Commander’s Media & Communications Award is Vice President of Corporate Citizenship Kevin Martinez. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The award reads: The American Legion National Commander’s 2016 Media and Communications Award Presented to ESPN, for your outstanding coverage of The American Legion Baseball World Series. Launched in 1979, ESPN has become one of
the greatest success stories in broadcasting history. With availability in approximately 95
million paid television households, the Walt Disney-owned company has become the
undisputed “World Wide Leader in Sports.” By using your online and television platforms,
you have opened viewership of The American Legion World Series and related events to
millions of audience members since 2011. The 2.2 million members of The American
Legion gratefully acknowledge your efforts in promoting The American Legion Baseball
program and entertaining the many fans and spectators who appreciate the dedication and
excellence of the young athletes who participate. Given this 31st day of August 2016 during
the 98th National Convention of The American Legion. Dale Barnett, National
Commander; Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant; Walter W. Ivie, Media &
Communications Commission Chairman. ... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

KEVIN MARTINEZ: Thank you very much. It's not ESPN unless you get a little
sizzle reel, a little video there. I just wanted to thank everybody for this incredible honor.
National Commander, thank you so much.

Quickly, I just wanted to say that I am very familiar with the work that you do every
day and the commitment that you have to maintain the freedoms and the honors that we
have because you have served your country. I am a product of a military family. My father
was underwater demolition. I’ve lived in Virginia Beach. I’ve lived in Ewa Beach, Hawaii.
I’ve lived in Keyport, Washington. And I was able to go to school because of the Admiral
Radford college scholarship in Honolulu, Hawaii, which was partly subsidized by The
American Legion. So I am personally very, very thankful for all you do.

But I represent the Walt Disney Company and ESPN, and I just want you to know
that this is part of the core of who we are because we want to honor all that you do in
maintaining our freedoms and the citizenship and the community service that you give
every day back to each of your communities. It is very real for us. Our employees, our
employee engagement programs, hiring our military veterans, our active duty, and, as you
just saw, we have just started to broadcast the Invictus Games brought to us by Prince
Harry and Mr. Fisher.

Again, just deep gratitude for this wonderful award. And I also want to let you know
that today we will also make a donation of $10,000 to The American Legion Child Welfare
Fund. Thank you, sir, for all you do. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I now call on Past National Commander
Michael D. Helm to present the Plaque of Appreciation to the Department of Maryland's
Commander Patricia McCoy for the outstanding job that the National Convention
Corporation of Maryland did in hosting the 2015 Convention in Baltimore, Maryland.

Presentation: Plaque of Appreciation to the City of Baltimore
Host City of the 2015 National Convention

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER HELM: Commander, there were challenges
leading up to last year's convention in the great city of Baltimore that many thought were
insurmountable. The great Department of Maryland, and especially the city of Baltimore,
met those challenges head on and treated The American Legion family to a great and
memorable convention. I would like to present this plaque to you, the city of Baltimore,
for the 2015 National Convention.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER MCCOY: Thank you, Commander Helm. On
behalf of the city of Baltimore, The American Legion family of Maryland, and our
Convention Corporation President and Past National Commander Clarence Bacon, I accept
this with pride and honor. Hope everyone enjoyed Baltimore last year. Thank you.
NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: In the order of time, we have adjusted the schedule slightly. One of our guest speakers is very close to being inbound. But the chair now recognizes the honorable Vincent Gaughan of Illinois, chairman of the Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments
Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman

To the 98th National Convention of The American Legion, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31 and September 1, 2016.

The Committee on Constitutional Amendments met at 9:00 a.m., Sunday, August 28, 2016, in Colonnade B, Second Floor of the Millennium Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio. Committee Liaison Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. (MD) called the roll and announced that 42 members of the Constitutional Amendments Committee were present. The following report was authorized by the members and is hereby submitted to this Convention.

The meeting was opened by Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. (MD), who acted as temporary chairman. He stated a quorum was present and proceeded to the first order of business, which was the election of a chairman and secretary.

Vincent M. Gaughan (IL) was elected Chairman and Cathy Gorst (WI) was duly elected Secretary. Thereupon they assumed their respective places.

Copies of the Resolution, the Report of the Standing Committee, the Charter of The American Legion National Constitution and By-Laws and the Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion, which include the Standing Rules of Convention, were made available to all members of the Committee.

The Chair called upon Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., National Judge Advocate, to give a summary background report on the resolution assigned to the Committee, which was done.

A motion was made by Charles Mills (NY) and seconded by Richard Perry (AZ) that all members of the Standing Committee on Constitution and By-Laws who were present at the meeting, but not actual delegates to the Convention Committee be seated with voice but no vote. The motion was carried by the members.

The Chair further announced that he was in agreement with the Report of the Standing Committee on the Constitution and By-laws.

Resolution No. 50 (CO) was considered. The Chair announced this resolution was out of order because it did not provide the complete text to be voted on for The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and that it can’t take effect until Congress changes the charter. It would also end the right of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Charities to accept donations, which would generate a tax deduction for the donor. This would require that American Legion Charities be shut down to avoid federal tax penalties and interest payments. It would also require The American Legion to incur the cost of returning donations to the donors.

James Johnson (LA) made a motion to rule out of order Resolution No. 50 (CO), seconded by Frank Porter (MD). Motion carried unanimously.

The Chair then asked for a motion that the Chairman and Secretary be permitted to sign the report to the Convention on behalf of the members of the Convention Committee. Charles Goodin (MO) made the motion and it was seconded by E. Michael Stelacio (PA). The motion was carried unanimously.

Jerry Lakey (OK) made the motion to attach the Report of the Constitution and By-laws Committee to this report as an exhibit, seconded by Don Nelson (NE). The motion was carried unanimously.

James Johnson (LA) made a motion to recess, subject to the call of the Chairman. The motion was seconded by Jim Wallace (MI). The motion was carried unanimously.
The Chairman then thanked the Committee for its cooperation and productive meeting. The meeting was then declared in recess pending a call from the Chairman of the Committee.

Mr. Commander, as a delegate to the 98th National Convention of The American Legion, I move the adoption of this report. ...Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion and I've heard several seconds on the way up. Any discussion? All in favor say aye. All opposed? The report of Constitutional Amendments is adopted.

At this time we've got another change. We're moving right up. The chair recognizes Brett P. Reistad of Virginia, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Legislation, for the purposes of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Legislation**

*Brett Reistad, Virginia, Chairman*

Good morning. I've never seen so many people ever assembled for a legislative report. The National Convention Committee on Legislation met on Sunday, August 28, 2016 in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cincinnati, Ohio. There were 44 delegates to the Committee present and 13 guests in attendance.

Following the preliminary activities to officially organize the Committee, the Chairman and Secretary were duly elected. I, Brett Reistad, a delegate from the Department of Virginia, was elected Chairman following a motion from John Graham, a delegate from the Department of New Hampshire. Art Schwabe, a delegate from Florida, was elected Secretary following a motion from Hank Robards, a delegate from the Department of Illinois.

There was no new business to discuss. The Legislation Convention Committee received no resolutions for consideration.

A motion by Mike Bondurant, a delegate from the Department of Washington, to allow the Chairman and Secretary to make technical corrections to the Committee Report, as necessary and appropriate, and to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report on behalf of the Convention Committee on Legislation, was unanimously approved and adopted by the Legislative Convention Committee.

National Commander Barnett, as a duly authorized Delegate to this Convention from the Department of Virginia, I move for the adoption of this report. …Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion and I've heard a second. Any discussion? All in favor signify by aye. All opposed? The report of the Convention Committee on Legislation is adopted.

The Chair recognizes Larry J. Besson, the Department of Illinois, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Internal Affairs, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs**

*Larry J. Besson, Illinois, Chairman*

At 9:30 am, Sunday, August 28, 2016, the Convention Committee of Internal Affairs, consisting of the two Subcommittees of Other Internal Matters and Membership met in the Grand Ballroom A, Second Floor, at the Millennium Hotel for the purpose of electing a Chairman and Secretary for Internal Affairs. Larry Besson (IL) was elected Chairman and Ken Orrock (SD) was elected Secretary for the purpose of reporting to the Convention.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Committee Chairman and Secretary be authorized to accept and sign the report of the Convention Committee on Internal Affairs on behalf of its delegates.
It was moved and seconded that the Chairman, Internal Affairs Convention Committee be authorized to accept the actions of the two sub-committees assigned to Internal Affairs on the resolutions assigned to the respective sub-committees.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Chairman and Secretary may make technical corrections to the resolutions reported out of this Committee to ensure proper wording and form without changing the substance or meaning of the resolution(s).

No further business was discussed at this point and the delegates were then released to the two sub-committees assigned to the Internal Affairs Convention Committee---Membership and Other Internal Matters---for the purpose of reviewing and acting on the assigned resolutions.

The Internal Affairs Committee was recessed at this point subject to call by the chairman if required.

The Convention Sub-Committees met and considered their assigned resolutions as follows:

Membership
Kenneth E. Orrock, South Dakota, Chairman

At 10:00 am, Sunday, August 28, 2016, 46 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee Membership met in the Pavilion Room on the second floor of the Hilton Millennium Hotel. Kenneth E. Orrock (SD) was elected Chairman and Gary Schacher (NY) was elected Secretary. The sub-committee considered four resolutions and their disposition is as follows:

Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 189 (MN): Post Credit for Members Gained Through Revitalization
Resolution No. 195 (OH): Membership Chairman Pins

Resolutions Approved as Amended

Resolution No. 226: Rename the North Carolina Trophy the Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs
(As amended)

WHEREAS, The American Legion is made up of only veterans who honorably served their nation during a period of war; and

WHEREAS, The members of The American Legion have maintained a deep sense of pride in their respective military customs, courtesies and traditions; and

WHEREAS, The National Executive Committee established a membership award to recognize one of the foreign departments each year and established the name of this award as the North Carolina Trophy; and

WHEREAS, The Department of North Carolina wished to recognize one of its favorite sons who has left our midst with a fitting tribute to his long-lasting dedication to our great organizations; and

WHEREAS, We can think of no greater honor than to change the name of The North Carolina Trophy to the Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the North Carolina Trophy be renamed to the Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award and that the criteria for qualification for this award remain as currently stated.
Rejected Resolution

Resolution No. 273 (IL): Include Department Service Website Link on Annual Dues Notices

Other Internal Matters

Larry J. Besson, Illinois, Chairman

At 10:00 am, Sunday, August 28, 2016, 36 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee on Other Internal Matters met in the Grand Ballroom A on the second floor of the Millennium Hotel. Larry Besson (IL) was elected Chairman and Larry Sheets (FL) was elected Secretary. The committee considered thirteen resolutions and their dispositions are as follows:

Approved Resolutions

Resolution No. 270: Increase Income Tax Deduction for Volunteer Mileage
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of wartime era veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is a firm supporter of the VA Voluntary Services Program which is the largest volunteer program in the federal government; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion statistics have shown for the last several years that over 7,000 volunteers have contributed over 850,000 volunteer hours annually, and the rising cost of gasoline is one of the barriers to new and current volunteer recruitment and retention; and
WHEREAS, As the federal budget is tightened due to the current economic situation, the reliance upon volunteers will continue to expand; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion, being one of the nation’s largest and most active community service organizations, recognizes the need to create an environment which would attract and retain volunteers; and
WHEREAS, One of the best ways to promote volunteerism is to help defray out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers; and
WHEREAS, For tax year 2015 the standard mileage rate for business use of a vehicle was over 50 cents per mile, medical rate was over 23 cents per mile; and
WHEREAS, The optional standard mileage rate for volunteers providing service to a government or charitable organization is still 14 cents per mile and has not changed since 1997; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to approve legislation to increase the volunteer mileage income tax deduction rate from 14 cents per mile to 24 cents per mile and to adjust this rate yearly based on regular CPI-based adjustments.

Resolution No. 359: Appreciation to Host City
Origin: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, The 98th National Convention has been held in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31 and September 1, 2016; and
WHEREAS, There has been a spirit of cooperation and friendship along with mutual helpfulness evidenced by the Legionnaires of Ohio, the officers of the convention
Proceedings of Wednesday, August 31, 2016

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31 and September 1, 2016, That we express our deep appreciation to the Department of Ohio, Governor of Ohio John Kasich; Mayor of Cincinnati John Cranley; the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, including the fire department, police department, and other public safety officials, and to The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Ohio, Inc., James C. Morris, President, around this nucleus has been built the moving force that provided for every necessity that made for a successful and enjoyable convention.

Referred to the Standing Internal Affairs Commission

Resolution No. 227 (VA): Defibrillators for Legion Posts

Resolutions Received and Recorded

Resolution No. 14 (NE): Endorsement of Jerry Landkamer for National Vice Commander
Resolution No. 47 (CO): Endorsement of Ralph P. Bozella for National Commander
Resolution No. 48 (CO): Endorsement of Pastor Stanley K. Hamamoto for National Chaplain
Resolution No. 65 (NV): Endorsement of Frederick S. Doten for National Historian
Resolution No. 82 (DE): Endorsement of Larry J. Marcoullier for National Vice Commander
Resolution No. 168 (IA): Endorsement of Bruce C. Feuerbach for National Vice Commander
Resolution No. 177 (DE): Endorsement of Michael S. Cotton for National Vice Commander of the Sons of The American Legion
Resolution No. 229 (AZ): Endorsement of Robert B. Gilmore, Jr. for National Historian

Rejected Resolutions

Resolution No. 7 (KS): Membership Eligibility in The American Legion and Auxiliary
Resolution No. 231 (NY): Alternative Standard Cap

Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of South Dakota, I move for the adoption of this report.

Thank you Mr. Commander for allowing chairman Besson and myself the time to make this report.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: I have a motion on the floor. Do I hear a second? ... Second. Is there any discussion? All those in favor signify by the normal sign. All opposed? The report from the Convention Committee on Internal Affairs is adopted. Membership awards will be presented after Mrs. Clinton's address as well as the NEF donations. At the present time we'll have video greetings from Representative Nancy Pelosi.
Greetings: Hon. Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives

Hello. I'm Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic leader and co-chair of the Bipartisan Hidden Heroes Congressional Caucus for Military and Veteran Caregivers, initiated by Secretary Elizabeth Dole. National Commander Dale Barnett, thank you for your enduring devotion to mutual helpfulness and for your invitation to address The American Legion. As a Californian, I'm especially proud of American Legion District 8 Commander Nelson Lum, who's with you there today.

Secretary Bob McDonald, thank you for your relentless efforts to ensure that our veterans and military families receive the benefits and care they have earned and deserve. As I said during your annual report to a joint session of the House and Senate committees on Veterans Affairs, The American Legion stands as the leading champion of our nation's servicemen and women. Legionnaires represent the best of America. America's servicemembers, veterans, military families, caregivers, spouses, Blue Star and Gold Star families know they can rely on all of you. In just two years, we will celebrate American Legion's Centennial. For nearly 100 years, The American Legion has safeguarded the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy.

Last week on Women's Equality Day, we commemorated the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. We're proud that in 1919 the Legion welcomed women veterans as full members before women had the right to vote in their country. We salute women veterans including your very own executive director, Verna Jones and Retired Brigadier General Wilma Vaught. It was an honor to celebrate Brigadier General Vaught's achievements at our Women's History Month celebration in U.S. Capitol Statuary Hall this year. We salute The American Legion's commitment to breaking down barriers of opportunity for all of our veterans.

For well over ten years, House democrats have worked with The American Legion at a regular VSO roundtable. Thanks to your critical support, we passed the largest increase in veterans health care funding in history. Because of your engagement and under the leadership of President Barack Obama and Congressman Chet Edwards, we implemented and funded the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which has transformed the lives of more than 1.5 million veterans, and we fought to ensure that their dependents and families could also receive a college education. Working together, we expanded Agent Orange disability benefits, bolstered mental health and job training services, and combatted chronic homelessness.

Together we are addressing the critical issues facing our nation's servicemembers, their families, and caregivers. More than 200,000 servicemembers are becoming veterans every year. In the course of my service in Congress, I have always made it a priority to visit our servicemembers to thank them for their service and to hear firsthand their accounts and sacrifices.


So often on my visits, our servicemembers will ask: What should my family and I expect when I go home? Meeting their needs in the field and answering that question is my top priority. House democrats will stand against any effort to privatize VA health care.
It was my honor to appoint U.S. Army veteran and proud San Franciscan Michael Blecker to the VA's Commission on Care, and I stand with Commissioner Blecker in his steadfast dissent to privatization or outsourcing. We must help, not hurt, the VA.

As we continue our work to diminish the disability claims backlog, we must also focus on fixing a broken appeals system. The VA Appeals Modernization Act ensures that no veteran has to fight for years just to get an answer. The House should take up this critical bill without further delay and pass it with no strings attached. Congress should also take up the bipartisan Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act to ensure veterans from all eras are eligible for VA caregiver services.

Again, thank you, American Legion, for ensuring that we uphold our bedrock promise; that just as the military leaves no one behind on the battlefield, when they come home, we leave no veteran behind. Enjoy your 98th Convention. God bless The American Legion, our veterans, our servicemembers and their families, and may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.

... The delegation viewed a series of videos and a musical interlude was played.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Our next guest served as first lady of the United States for eight years. She was elected to represent New York in the U.S. Senate in 2000. She also served as our nation's 67th secretary of state from January 21, 2009, to February 1, 2013. Before entering political life, she was an accomplished attorney in Arkansas and also served as that state's first lady from 1979 to 1981 and 1983 to 1992. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at Wellesley College and is a graduate of Yale Law School. Her campaign website promises that she will support veterans and ensure that they have the opportunities and tools they need for success when they return home. She also promises to strengthen services and support for military families and keep our military strong and resilient. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Democratic nominee for president of the United States, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. (Applause)

Address: Hon. Hillary Clinton
Democratic Presidential Candidate

Good afternoon. I am delighted to have this great honor of being here and having this opportunity to address you. I want to thank the national commander. Thank you, Commander Barnett. I want to thank Verna Jones, your executive director, and Dewey Moss, aide to the commander. And I want to thank a longtime friend and advisor to me, someone who I am very grateful to, and that is your national treasurer, George Buskirk. Most of all, thanks to you, all the Legionnaires here and across America. Thanks for your service in our Armed Forces. You wore the uniform. You took an oath. You put your life on the line to protect the greatest country on Earth. (Applause)

There are some who may argue with that, but not around me. When you came home, you joined The American Legion, and, by doing so, you kept serving. Just look at what the Legion does. You care for wounded warriors. You help raise the next generation of American patriots. I want to give a special shout-out to Boys Nation, which meant so much to my husband when he was growing up. And when I told him I was coming here today, he said, "You've got to mention Boys Nation." I told him I would but I also have to mention Girls Nation too. (Cheers and applause)

I want to thank your Auxiliary, the world's largest women's patriotic service organization. (Cheers and applause)

I was honored to receive the Auxiliary's Public Spirit Award in 1997, and I have great admiration for the work you do. As the daughter of a veteran, as a proud American, I am grateful to you all.
Now, I'm not going to talk a lot about politics today, but I do want to say this: Whoever America elects this fall won't just be our next president; that person will be our next commander-in-chief. Every person in this room understands how great a responsibility that is. Now, I know some of you are Democrats and some of you are Republicans and some of you are Independents. I suppose there are some of you who have never voted for a Democrat before. I get that. My dad was a rock-ribbed Republican. But I learned at our dinner table that we can disagree without being disagreeable. (Applause)

And I want you to know: If I am fortunate enough to win this election, I will be a president for Democrats, Republicans, Independents, for people who vote for me, for people who don't, for all Americans. That is what I think we need. We need to unify our country and go forward into the future with confidence and optimism. (Applause)

Today I want you to know a little bit about where I stand and how I see the world and America's place in it. I spent four years as your secretary of state, eight years before that as senator from the great state of New York. Six years on the Senate Armed Services Committee. If there's one core belief that has guided and inspired me every step of the way, it is this: The United States is an exceptional nation. I believe we are still Lincoln's last best hope of Earth. We're still Reagan's shining city on a hill. We're still Robert Kennedy's great, unselfish, compassionate country.

It's not just that we have the greatest military or that our economy is larger than any on Earth; it's also the strength of our values, the strength of the American people, everyone who works harder, dreams bigger, and never, ever stops trying to make our country and the world a better place. And part of what makes America an exceptional nation is that we're also an indispensable nation. In fact, we are the indispensable nation. People all over the world look to us and follow our lead.

My friends, we are so lucky to be Americans. It is an extraordinary blessing. It's why so many people from so many places want to be Americans too. But it's also a serious responsibility. The decisions we make and the actions we take, even the actions we don't take, affect millions, even billions, of lives. You know that. You've seen it.

Now, all this may seem evident, especially to men and women who have worn the uniform. You may wonder how anyone could disagree. But, in fact, my opponent in this race has said very clearly that he thinks American exceptionalism is insulting to the rest of the world. In fact, when Vladimir Putin, of all people, criticized American exceptionalism, my opponent agreed with him, saying, and I quote, "If you're in Russia, you don't want to hear that America is exceptional." Well, maybe you don't want to hear it, but that doesn't mean it's not true. (Applause)

My opponent misses something important. When we say America is exceptional, it doesn't mean that people from other places don't feel deep national pride, just like we do; it means that we recognize America's unique and unparalleled ability to be a force for peace and progress, a champion for freedom and opportunity.

Our power comes with a responsibility to lead humbly, thoughtfully, and with a fierce commitment to our values. Because when America fails to lead, we leave a vacuum that either causes chaos, or other countries or networks rush in to fill the void. So no matter how hard it gets, no matter how great the challenge, America must lead. The question is how we lead, what kind of ideas, strategies, and tactics we bring to our leadership.

American leadership means standing with our allies, because our network of allies is part of what makes us exceptional. No other country in the world has alliances like ours. Russia and China have nothing close. We stand with our allies because generations of American troops fought and died to secure those bonds and because they deliver for us every day.

Our allies share intelligence on terrorists. They provide staging areas for our military so we can respond quickly to events on the other side of the world. Other nations' soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines often fight side by side with ours. Some of you may have served and fought alongside men and women from other countries. You saw them in action.
You know how important these bonds are to our security. Threatening to walk away from our alliances, ignoring the importance that they still are to us is not just wrong, it's dangerous. If I'm your president, our friends will always know: America will have your backs, and we expect you to have ours. American leadership means bringing the world together to solve global problems as only we can.

The United States built the international coalition against ISIS. Now we're working with partners to take back territory and defeat them without getting drawn into a ground war. We brought the world together to impose sanctions on Iran and secure a deal that put a lid on Iran's nuclear program without firing a single shot. You don't build a coalition by insulting our friends or acting like a loose cannon. You do it by putting in the slow, hard work of building relationships.

Getting countries working together was my job every day as your secretary of state. It's more than a photo op. It takes consistency and reliability. Actually, it's just like building personal relationships. People have to get to know that they can count on you. That you won't say one thing one day and something totally different the next. And it certainly takes more than trying to make up for a year of insults and insinuations by dropping in on our neighbors for a few hours and then flying home again. That is not how it works. American leadership means leading with our values, in pursuance of our interests, in protection of our security. At our best, the United States is the global force for freedom, justice, and human dignity. (Applause)

We celebrate our diversity as a source of national strength. Just look at our Armed Forces, which represents all races, religions, ethnicities, and, yes, immigrants from other countries, all fighting for the red, white, and blue. We stand up to regimes that abuse human rights. We stand up for religious and ethnic minorities, for women, for people with disabilities. And we comport ourselves with honor. There's no better proof of that than what our Navy SEALs did during the raid to kill Osama bin Laden. (Applause)

I was deeply honored to be part of that small group advising the president. I brought to those discussions my experience as a senator from New York on 9/11 and my commitment to do whatever I could in whatever role I had to bring bin Laden to justice. You've all seen the picture of us crowded into the smaller situation room watching the video screen. Every second counted. One of the copters misgauged how high the wall was around the courtyard, clipped the tail, getting disabled. It didn't stop the SEALs from rushing out, getting into the compound, returning fire against bin Laden's bodyguards, taking on his adult son and finally bin Laden himself.

But the SEALs knew that they had to destroy the helicopter before they left. I was holding my breath through the entire operation. Because at any time Pakistani soldiers could have arrived. This compound was in a military garrison city, actually the home of their military academy. So, yes, every second counted. But, still, our SEALs took the time to move the women and children, bin Laden's family members, to safety before destroying the helicopter. That is what honor looks like. That is America at our best. (Applause)

Maybe the soldiers of other nations wouldn't have bothered. Or maybe they'd have taken revenge on those family members of terrorists. But that is not who we are. And anyone who doesn't understand that doesn't understand what makes our nation great. And let me say something else about American greatness. There's no question: We face real threats and real enemies that we need to confront and defeat. But my opponent is wrong when he says America is no longer great.

Consider the record of the past eight years. In 2009, our global economy was collapsing. Osama bin Laden was plotting. We had more than 180,000 troops fighting two wars. Iran was racing toward a nuclear weapon. Many of our allies were less supportive of American leadership than they had been in decades.

Look where we are now. We've pulled the global economy out of freefall, thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of the American people. We've redeployed well over 100,000 troops from Iraq and Afghanistan so they can go home, rest, and train for future
contingencies. We cut off Iran's path to a nuclear weapon. We convinced Russia to reduce their nuclear weapons arsenal. We protected our ally Israel and we brought Osama bin Laden to justice.

We did that, we Americans did all of that, working together across party lines. And there is no question we have more work to do, but let's be clear: We are stronger together, and it will be my goal, if I am fortunate enough to be your president, to bring people back together again, to set our goals and move forward to achieve them. (Applause)

I know we can't cozy up to dictators. We have to stand up to them. We can't contain ISIS. We must defeat them, and we will. We will do whatever is necessary for as long as it takes to bring them to justice and end their reign of terror once and for all.

This election is about how to make things better. Now, make no mistake, I believe we do have better days ahead. But things could also get worse, if more countries get nuclear weapons, if we abandon our allies, if our commander-in-chief orders our military to break the laws and commit torture or murder terrorist family members. That's why it is so critical we get this right. And let me underscore what I have said throughout this campaign: We must only send our troops into harm's way as a last resort, not a first choice. That must be our bedrock principle. (Applause)

But we must be able to act decisively on our own when we need to. I completely reject anyone, including my opponent, who calls the American military, and I quote, "a disaster." That is an insult to the men and women serving today and all who have served before who put their lives on the line. It's just not true. We do have more work to do to continue to have the strongest, most effective military in the world. I know this is something that matters a great deal to everyone in this room. Here's what we have to do. We can't lose our military edge. That means giving the Pentagon the stable, predictable funding it needs to make smart investments. (Applause)

You've heard of the “sequester,” the arbitrary caps that Congress has imposed on our entire government for the past several years. Now, look, I am all for cutting the fat out of the budget and making sure we stretch our dollars and proud of the fact that, when my husband left office, we had a balanced budget and a surplus, and I hope that someday we can get back to doing that. But we cannot impose arbitrary limits on something as important as our military. That makes no sense at all. The sequester makes our country less secure. Let's end it and get a budget deal that supports America's military, our families, and our country. And let's make reform a priority so that the Defense Department spends its budget on the right things.

And, by the way, the last thing we need is a president who brings more name-calling and temper tantrums to Washington. We've got to get people listening to each other again, getting both parties actually to work together. Let's modernize our Army and Marines, our Navy and Air Force, our Coast Guard. We need to respond to evolving threats from states like Russia and China, Iran, and North Korea, from networks, criminal and terrorist networks, like ISIS. We need a military that is ready and agile so it can meet the full range of threats and operate on short notice across every domain, not just land, sea, air and space, but also cyberspace.

We'll invest in new technologies so new breakthroughs can transform our military, just as stealth, precision weapons, and advanced communications did in the past. We'll make a renewed push to reduce the world's nuclear weapons, because that does make us all safer, and we'll step up our efforts to secure nuclear material around the world and stop terrorists from acquiring or using weapons of mass destruction.

One of the first things I will do as president is to call for a new nuclear posture review. We have to make sure that America's arsenal is prepared to meet future threats. We'll invest in the next frontier of military engagement, protecting U.S. interests in outer space and cyberspace.

You've seen reports. Russia's hacked into a lot of things. China's hacked into a lot of things. Russia even hacked into the Democratic National Committee, maybe even some
state election systems. So we've got to step up our game, make sure we are well defended and able to take the fight to those who go after us. As president, I will make it clear that the United States will treat cyber-attacks just like any other attack. We will be ready with serious political, economic, and military responses. And we're going to invest in protecting our governmental networks and our national infrastructure. I want us to lead the world in setting the rules of cyberspace. If America doesn't, others will.

So, in short, we have to be ready to win today's fights and tomorrow's. But you know that the most important thing isn't the size of our military or the sophistication of our weapons. The most important thing is our people, the men and women who put on the uniform and serve. (Applause)

We need to take a hard look at our military's personnel policies to make sure we are doing everything to attract and keep the best and the brightest who volunteer. We need to support not only them, but also their families. And as president, I will never forget the debt we owe our veterans and your families who also served. I will never, ever disrespect Gold Star families who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation or prisoners of war who endured so much in our name. (Applause)

To insult them is just so wrong, and it says a lot about the person doing the insulting. In the Senate, I worked with Republicans to increase the benefit paid to Gold Star families; to expand access to military health insurance; to make sure all members of the Guard and Reserves and their families have access to health benefits, whether they're deployed or training at home.

I fought successfully to amend the 2007 Defense Appropriations Act, to establish a training program for family caregivers helping loved ones with traumatic brain injuries. Senator John McCain and I joined forces to personally raise money for a state-of-the-art rehab facility at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio to help seriously wounded servicemembers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Like you, I was outraged by the scandals at VA hospitals, people waiting for months or years for wheelchairs and basic medications. Some even dying while waiting for an appointment. I know that you heard from Secretary McDonald, and I know how hard he and his team are working. We are going to build a 21st century Department of Veterans Affairs that delivers world-class care, and we are not going to let anyone privatize the VA. We're going to reform and strengthen it, not privatize it! (Applause)

We will ensure access to timely, quality care for all of our veterans; improve care for women, who are often underserved; identify and treat all wounds of war, visible and invisible, including Agent Orange and Gulf War Syndrome and traumatic brain injury and PTSD. We will end the epidemic of veteran suicides by expanding access to mental health care and fighting the stigma that isolates too many of our veterans from getting the care that they need! (Applause)

I feel passionately about this because I have looked into the eyes of too many family members who have lost their loved one to suicide. That's why just two days ago, when I released my plan to improve mental health services for all Americans, I included a specific section about more help for veterans and their families, because we know too many aren't getting the help they need right now. We've got to serve them, just as they served us. We are also going to help more veterans looking for jobs with expanded tax credits for businesses that hire veterans; more support to veterans who want to start their own businesses; and making it easier for veterans to get credit for the skills they learned while serving. (Applause)

And we will crack down on for-profit schools and companies that prey on or discriminate against servicemembers, veterans, or military families. They should be ashamed of themselves, and we're going to hold them accountable. We will also work closely with The American Legion to clean up and expedite the appeals process. Benefits should be delivered as quickly as possible and appeals should be decided as expeditiously as possible. I thank you for the work you are doing on that.
Now, a lot of what I have mentioned has support from Democrats and Republicans. Maintaining our military and caring for our veterans should never be partisan issues. Defending American exceptionalism should always be above politics. But this is not a normal election. The debates are not the normal disagreements between Republicans and Democrats. So I hope you will listen carefully to what my opponent and I propose. Consider our plans and the values behind them. And after you've given us both a fair hearing, I hope that you'll join the growing number of Americans, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, who are supporting our vision for the kind of future that we want for our country. This election shouldn't be about ideology. It's not just about differences over policy. It truly is about who has the experience and the temperament to serve as president and commander-in-chief.

Just three weeks ago 50 Republican national security experts, who served in prior Republican administrations, wrote a letter saying that they will not vote for Donald Trump because he would be, in their words, the most reckless president in American history. By contrast, I am deeply honored to have so many retired military leaders backing me along with these Republican experts. I’m supported by people on both sides of the aisle and both sides of the debates that have defined our foreign policy for the last 30 years. They know I believe in a bipartisan foreign policy. They know I believe we should be finding ways to bring our country together around national security, our role in the world, our values. They know they can count on me to do that. And what matters to them is that we make the right choice in November.

The stakes this fall are as high as any election in our lifetimes. So I'm going to keep raising these issues, keep telling people where I stand, laying out plans for what I do if I'm elected. I have to tell you, it is a little funny to me. I get criticized for having so many plans. People say: Oh, there she goes with another plan about mental health, about veterans. Well, I have this old-fashioned idea: If I'm asking for your vote for president, I should tell you what I want to do as your president. So, yes, I have laid out plans, and I'm going to work my heart out to implement those plans. And if I win this fall, no one will work harder for our troops, our veterans and our military families.

This is personal to me, starting with my dad. His name was Hugh Rodham. He enlisted in the Navy shortly after Pearl Harbor. He became a chief petty officer at Great Lakes, north of Chicago, responsible for training thousands of young sailors before they shipped out to sea, mostly to the Pacific Theater.

After my dad died, I received letters from men who had served under him. I treasure them to this day. My father told me how emotional he got when he accompanied his trainees to the West Coast and saw those young sailors get on board their ships. He knew some of them wouldn't survive. But he believed in their cause, he believed in them, and they went to serve, to protect our country. They knew their country needed them.

Over the course of the last years, I have also had the privilege of working with, helping and supporting so many active duty and retired military members and families, first as first lady, then as senator, then as secretary of state. Whenever I would go anywhere representing you and be privileged to meet with the men and women who serve our country, I would sit down, if we had a chance, and hear what was on their minds, would shake hands and take pictures, sometimes bring messages back to their loved ones.

And I, too, knew that some of those young men and women wouldn't be coming home either. It's that kind of courage and honor that our men and women in uniform demonstrate every single day. (Applause)

I will never forget that, and I would expect The American Legion to be my partner in the White House to make sure I never do. You and all our veterans deserve nothing less, our respect, our thanks, but you also deserve a country that honors your service, not just with words, but with deeds. (Applause)

That's why The American Legion is so critical, working every day to make sure America lives up to that standard. I will be doing that work right alongside you if I am
given the great honor to serve as your president and commander-in-chief. Thank you all, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Secretary Clinton, I'd love to give you one of our medallions. Inscribed are the words "For God and Country." Thank you for your kind words for our veterans, your support of veterans, and we wish you the very best. ... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes G. Michael Schlee of Maryland, chairman of the National Convention Committee on National Security, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on National Security
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman

At 9:00 a.m., Sunday, August 28, 2016, 316 delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security initially met in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Rooms 200-205, Second Floor. Mr. G. Michael Schlee (Maryland) was elected Chairman and Mr. E.C. Toppin (North Carolina) was appointed Secretary.

After the initial meeting, the following convention subcommittees met, held elections and dealt with the resolutions assigned to them:

- Aerospace: Anthony Heath (MA), Chairman, C. R. Craynon (OH), Secretary
- Conventional Armed Forces: Charles E. Kruger (MN), Chairman, Edward Mallicoat (NY), Secretary
- Foreign Relations: Paul Dillard (TX), Chairman, Jim Hawk (SC), Secretary
- Law and Order & Homeland Security: George Wehrli (FL), Chairman, Richard R. Keiser (NY), Secretary
- Military Benefits & Quality of Life: Melvin Smullen (MD), Chairman, Dianne Boland (FL), Secretary
- National Guard and Reserve Forces: William Goede (MN), Chairman, Dennis Duggan (MD), Secretary
- Unconventional Forces and Intelligence: Doug Haggan (FR), Chairman, Charles Sharits (TN), Secretary

At 11:00 a.m., Sunday, August 28, 2016, the delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on Security reconvened in the Duke Energy Convention Center, Rooms 200-205, Second Floor. Reports of all Convention Subcommittees were read and their recommended actions on resolutions considered. A total of 90 resolutions were assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security or prepared by the Committee to meet issues which were held to be of concern to The American Legion and germane to its principles and objectives. The Convention Committee authorized the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report of the Convention Committee on National Security on behalf of its delegates and make technical and administrative corrections to the resolutions reported out of the Committee.
WHEREAS, People are the United States Air Force’s top priority and the Air Force is the world’s premier aerospace force because its great people–active-duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian–continue to serve selflessly as a total force under increasingly difficult circumstances; and

WHEREAS, In order to grow the force, recruiting and retention are among its highest priorities and to continue attracting and retaining dedicated men and women the Air Force recognizes that it must continue its efforts to improve pay, benefits, and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, Since September 11, 2001 the Air Force has executed thousands of airlifts, moving millions of tons of cargo and passengers in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and then New Dawn; and

WHEREAS, The Air Force simultaneously provided top cover and weapons on target with more than a hundred-thousand sorties supporting those same operations; and

WHEREAS, Air Force aeromedical evacuation crews surged to complete over a hundred-thousand of patient movements; and

WHEREAS, On the home front, Air Force fighter, air refueling, and early warning aircraft have flown thousands of sorties supporting Operation Noble Eagle; and

WHEREAS, To meet the challenges of adversaries at home and abroad, Air Force strategy calls for a capabilities-based approach to defense planning which enables the service to answer a broad range of challenges posed by potential adversaries, while also developing the capabilities it needs for the future; and

WHEREAS, In assessing existing and potential adversaries’ capabilities against our own, the Air Force is developing task forces for a variety of mission requirements, from strategic response to homeland security, for example, Global Strike Task Force, which describes how we will operate in an anti-access scenario is the next step in the journey to fully achieve Air Force missions, while also opening doors to adaptive and innovative operational plans and relevant organization structure; and

WHEREAS, Continued investment in the core competencies of aerospace power–aerospace superiority, global attack, precision engagement, information superiority, rapid global mobility, and agile combat support–will continue to be the key to preserving the Air Force’s ability to respond to threats to America’s national security whenever and wherever they occur; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Congress to appropriately support the United States Air Force’s commitment to attract, retain, and train quality people and to mold them into an expeditionary aerospace force capable of flexibly responding to threats to America’s national security; to enhance readiness through its continued focus on total force integration and the integration of air and space systems; and to build and implement a transformation and modernization program that will maintain America’s dominance in air, space, and cyberspace well into the 21st century.
Resolution No. 225: Fully Fund NASA
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Commercial aviation is vital to the nation’s economic well-being; and
WHEREAS, NASA’s aeronautics research contributes significantly to air travel innovation and aligns with the principles, goals, and objectives of the National Aeronautics Research and Development Policy and its related National Aeronautics Research and Development Plan; and
WHEREAS, NASA explores early-stage concepts and ideas, develops new technologies and operational procedures through foundation research, along with demonstrating the potential of promising new vehicles, operations, and safety technology in relevant environments; and
WHEREAS, NASA is addressing the research challenges that must be overcome to achieve the goals of the Next Generation Air Transportation System or NextGen, a technology modernization effort that will make air travel safer, more flexible, more efficient, and to enable the design of vehicles that can support NextGen including unmanned aircraft; and
WHEREAS, The goals of NASA are to expand airspace capacity, enable fuel efficient flight planning, reduce the overall environmental footprint of airplanes today and in the future, diminish delays on the ground and in the sky, and improve the ability of aircraft to operate in all weather conditions while meeting or exceeding safety standards; and
WHEREAS, A goal that needs continued funding is for the X-43A Scramjet is essential; and
WHEREAS, Test flights are part of NASA Hyper-X program, an advanced research effort in propulsion technologies for high speed flight within the atmosphere and into Earth orbit; and
WHEREAS, After many years of research and development testing the craft met major milestones propelling itself to Mach 9.6 or nearly 7,000 mph; and
WHEREAS, Researchers predict scramjet speed could reach 15 times the speed of sound so that an 18 hour trip to Tokyo from New York City becomes a 2 hour flight; and
WHEREAS, The dissemination and use of space systems technology, the research programs on which it is based, and the spin-off products, techniques and services derived from the U.S. space program are vital components of the nation’s economy and the well-being of its citizens; and
WHEREAS, The U.S. space program has kept the nation on the leading edge of the technology frontier, has created jobs, improved communications, electronics, material, diagnosis and treatment of medical care for veterans and all Americans, fostered new scholastic interest in space science, provided insight into the evolution of the universe and current state of the earth, its environment and its solar system, and has provided visions and objectives for the future for business, industry and academia and the nation’s youth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to make funding of NASA’s programs among its highest priority ensuring the continued superiority of the American aviation industry and continued high safety record of American aircraft while looking toward future innovation in a collaborative effort between NASA and the aircraft Industry; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion deems it imperative that the United States, in the face of increasing competition, maintain its hard won status as the world leader in aeronautics and aircraft production and in space exploration and research; to realize this goal, we urge the Congress to provide: adequate funding for NASA along with the nation's civilian and military aerospace research and development programs to maintain U.S. technological leadership; adequate funding to build,
upgrade and enhance the nation's civilian and military aerospace research facilities and wind tunnels; a renewed national commitment to education involving academia in aeronautical and aerospace engineering research and technologies insuring a state of the art educated work force; oversight and investigating functions and related activities with respect to the transfer of American aerospace technology abroad; provide that all of our military aircrafts are design, manufactured and assembled within the borders of the United States.

Conventional Armed Forces
Charles E. Kruger, Minnesota, Chairman

Resolution No. 19: Develop Defense Against Electromagnetic Pulse Attack
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, In defiance of the United States and international community, both North Korea and Iran actively strive for missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads; and
WHEREAS, The U.S. must maintain superior strategic deterrents and defense systems in the interest of national defense from both conventional and unconventional foes operating in either symmetrical or asymmetrical environments; and
WHEREAS, Islamic violent extremists and rogue nations continue to plot against the West and seek to destroy the U.S.; and
WHEREAS, The U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has requested $7.5 billion for FY 2017, encompassing $1.0 billion for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) program, which will increase the number of deployed Ground Based Interceptors (GBI) to 44 by the end of 2017; and
WHEREAS, MDA requested $162 million to continue the development of the Long Range Discrimination Radar and an additional $305 million to complete two construction phases, with a completion date of 2019; and
WHEREAS, MDA has initiated a redesign of the Kill Vehicle for the GMD GBI with a budget of $274 million and an anticipated deployment date of 2020; and
WHEREAS, The Congressionally-sanctioned Commission to Assess the Threat to the U.S. from Electromagnetic Pulse has clearly defined the vulnerabilities in America's homeland defense posture to include potential catastrophic damage to U.S. infrastructure, telecommunications, banking, energy, transportation, food, water, emergency services, space systems, and government agencies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the United States government to fully fund, develop, and deploy a national ballistic missile defense system designed to intercept electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the United States government to swiftly commission the further development and installation of electronic equipment and components resistant to EMP to quickly provide significant protection and limit damage to high-value electrical generation and transmission assets as well as emergency generation and re-start capability; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the United States government to expeditiously develop an EMP response plan to include necessary back-up systems and corresponding supply of electronic parts and equipment vital to a successful American defense and response in the event of such an attack.
Resolution No. 86: National Defense Budget
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, The American Legion views a strong national defense as paramount to national security; and
WHEREAS, The House Armed Services Committee approving a $583 billion total defense authorization bill for 2017; and
WHEREAS, More than $1 trillion in sequestration-related defense cuts are slated for now through 2021; and
WHEREAS, Secretary Hagel commissioned a report that stated, “If sequestration-level cuts persist, our forces will assume substantial additional risks in certain missions and will continue to face significant readiness and modernization challenges”; and
WHEREAS, Not only do the spending cuts downsize the force structure, but also reduce service members pay and benefits, which could potentially lead to the loss of highly trained men and women; and
WHEREAS, While the Department of Defense is content on shrinking the size and scope of the United States military, our major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rogue nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to oppose any future budget cuts in military spending proposed by the Department of Defense; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That Congress not allow our military forces to reach a weakened state in these uncertain and perilous times.

Resolution No. 96: Support Full Funding and Resourcing for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, Our national security depends to a large extent on the ability of the United States to maintain sea superiority as well as strategic combat capabilities of the United States Navy and Marine Corps; and
WHEREAS, The Navy and Marine Corps have continually shown the ability of the United States to maintain a forward posture, projecting United States power overseas, when and where needed around the world to uphold our national security; and
WHEREAS, To maintain force readiness, the Navy and Marine Corps must balance priorities of manpower, current and future readiness, quality of service and alignment; and
WHEREAS, Balancing critical combat readiness with future navy requirements is essential to United States Naval superiority; and
WHEREAS, A 21st century Navy requires rapid technological advancements in the areas of command and control, which will require judicious upgrades of its systems; and
WHEREAS, The programs that will be the core of United States Navy and Marine Corps forces in the 21st century require substantial investments; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the Administration and the Congress to fully resource and fund the United States Navy and Marine Corps to provide credible combat power from the sea.
Resolution No. 104: Rebuild America’s Defense Industrial Base  
Origin: Maryland  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  
WHEREAS, Developing new technologies for the Armed Forces can be hindered by budget shortfalls despite the fact that the United States is currently the world leader in development of new technology, thereby disrupting materiel development vital to national security; and  
WHEREAS, The United States fighting forces must be equipped with state-of-the-art technological advances to assure their capability to win on the modern battlefield, whether on land, sea, or in the air; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Administration and Congress to rebuild America’s industrial base by continuing to adequately fund research, development, and acquisition budgets to assure our military production can meet national requirements especially when United States military power is committed; and, be it finally  
RESOLVED, That the Administration and Congress encourage the rebuilding of America’s defense industrial base by having a proper balance of policies that: increase and then sustain domestic production at levels that maintain a robust and internationally competitive defense industry, keep the arms industry internationally competitive and ensure that the United States is not putting itself at risk by having our armaments produced offshore.

Resolution No. 215: Long-Range Strike Capabilities  
Origin: North Carolina  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  
WHEREAS, United States Air Force Chief of Staff General Schwartz once stated that “Deterrence is not a fading construct in national security – re-emerging and growing in importance as an aspect of U.S. defense policy, risks and uncertainty cloud our ability to forecast the weapons needed to offer deterrence in a world of changing economies, alliances, competing political systems all of which require defense planning for the potential threats of ten and twenty years in the future”; and  
WHEREAS, Russia and China continue to update their strategic-missile capabilities evidenced by exercises such as the Russia and China intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests; and  
WHEREAS, The Russian Defense Ministry proposed 16 test launches of its ICBM’s for 2016; and  
WHEREAS, In December of 2015, China conducted a launcher test of a new rail-mobile version of its newest ICBM, the DF-41 (CSS-X-20); and  
WHEREAS, Development of Russian surface-to-air missiles (SAM) has progressed to the point where there is concern about the ability of present non-stealth vehicles in the bomber mix to penetrate modern air defenses; and  
WHEREAS, The President’s 2017 budget proposal provides $1.4 billion for Air Force Long Range Strike Bombers, 3.1 billion for seven KC-46 Tankers, and $89 million for Carrier based Aerial Refueling Systems (CBARS); and  
WHEREAS, The U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Army have allocated $4.61 billion for drones in Fiscal Year 2017 budget; and  
WHEREAS, Russia and China have a history of supplying their weapon systems to nations which are often unfriendly with the U.S.; and  
WHEREAS, We need to be prepared to deal with advanced fighter technology in quantities and locations beyond Russia and China; and
WHEREAS, China and Russia have failed to support efforts to impose effective sanctions on Iran’s nuclear program and in the case of Russia, they have unfrozen a contract to sell its S-300 anti-aircraft missile system to Iran; and

WHEREAS, Technical opportunities are changing constantly making the selection of what new capabilities should be developed to counter anticipated threats a major challenge as an error in selection of a course of development can have repercussions for decades; questions concerning manned or unmanned, hypersonic conventional or nuclear, missile or aircraft will constantly face the strategic planner while restricted defense budgets and the need to support other facets of the spectrum of conflict will persist; and

WHEREAS, Major General Jim Martin, Air Force budget director there have been sacrifices in modernization to uphold current readiness; and

WHEREAS, The United States Air Force was forced to delay five F-35’s, some fourth-generation modifications, and delay completion of recapitalization efforts for the C-130H; and

WHEREAS, Protecting modernization priorities, including the Long Range Strike Bomber, the KC-46A refueling tanker, and key space and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance programs, is vital to the future force; and

WHEREAS, Questions exist about the nature of the strike solution uncertainties that may arise in the next decade that warrant the relatively inexpensive efforts to define the requirements of a long range strike weapon; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the Department of Defense to undertake an adequately funded and prioritized program to define the nature of a long-range strike capability in the acquisition cycle where a concept including performance is established, systems engineering plans are ready, a request of proposal is on-hand and ready to commence the development test and production of a new long-range strike capability to address potential threats; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to fully fund the initial steps leading to capability of rapidly beginning the acquisition process for upgrades in long-range strike capabilities should the risk assessment determine it necessary circa 2018.

Resolution No. 217: Identifying National Interests Before Committing Military Forces and Assets
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion considers itself to be a partner with the Department of Defense in ensuring the nation’s security; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is currently under significant economic and budgetary constraints which has the potential to negatively impact the ability of the military to protect the nation; and
WHEREAS, It has been shown repeatedly an uninformed and uninvolved public will quickly lose confidence and deny support for military operations they do not understand; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (50 U.S.C.1541-1548); and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion, in keeping with its founding principle of a strong national security, call on the President of the United States, in compliance with the War Powers Resolution of 1973, to inform the American people and Congress of the critical national interests served by committing U.S. armed forces or military assets to hostile action; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That before committing military assets to hostile action, specific goals, overwhelming force levels necessary to accomplish the goals, parameters identifying when the specific goals are met, and realistic costs in national treasure must be identified and articulated to the American people and the Congress; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion define hostile action as any action where the use of lethal force is authorized, imminent, or implied to accomplish a military objective within the borders of a sovereign foreign nation; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourage Congress to once again establish itself as the oversight mechanism as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States in Article 1 Section 8, "The Powers of Congress."

Resolution No. 218: Support for the Selective Service Registration Program
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 49 (CO))

WHEREAS, The American Legion has given long-standing support to universal military training; and

WHEREAS, Despite the success of the all-volunteer force, Selective Service registration continues to serve as our defense manpower insurance policy; and

WHEREAS, The current reality of the upcoming reductions in end-strength across all branches of the active duty force as a result of the Budget Control Act of 2011 and continued sequestration only reinforces the need for the capability to reconstitute our forces in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, World Wars I and II began long before our country became involved, allowing the United States the benefit of abundant time to accomplish registration before troops were actually committed, a luxury we cannot expect to enjoy in today’s unpredictable environment; and

WHEREAS, The Selective Service Registration Program has enjoyed remarkable success as more that 90 percent of our 18-25 year old men have registered and there is virtually no resistance to the program; and

WHEREAS, Registration is one of the few remaining obligations our nation requires of its young men and removing this “rite of passage” for all men would reduce each man’s level of consciousness about military service and the obligation to defend our nation; and

WHEREAS, If a national emergency arose, females would be as willing as their male counterparts to serve their country; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense has opened all Military Occupational Specialties to female servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, Each year we see an increase in female membership in The American Legion; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion
supports the retention of the Selective Service Registration Program as being in the best interests of all Americans, and its maintenance is a proven cost-effective, essential, and rapid means of reconstituting the required forces to protect our national security interests; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to amend the Selective Service Registration Program to include the mandatory registration of females between the ages of 18-25 years of age.

Resolution No. 219: Support Full Funding for the Department of the Army Budget Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States Army is serving a nation at war and, as America’s strategic and decisive land and expeditionary combat force, is a proud member of the Joint Force providing combatant commanders with relevant and ready campaign power; and

WHEREAS, The Army’s compelling needs include providing landscape power, training and equipping soldiers and adaptive leaders for the rigors of war, sustaining the all-volunteer force, and providing the infrastructure and support systems to ensure the Army is able to execute its missions; and

WHEREAS, The momentum of Army transformation and modernization needs to be maintained so as to deal with irregular, catastrophic, disruptive and traditional challenges; and

WHEREAS, The Army’s vision is to remain the preeminent land power, the ultimate instrument of national resolve, that is both ready and relevant to the challenges of the dangerous and complex 21st century security environment; and

WHEREAS, The United States Army is serving a nation at war and, as America’s strategic and decisive land and expeditionary combat force, is a proud member of the Joint Force providing combatant commanders with relevant and ready campaign power; and

WHEREAS, The Army’s compelling needs include providing landscape power, training and equipping soldiers and adaptive leaders for the rigors of war, sustaining the all-volunteer force, and providing the infrastructure and support systems to ensure the Army is able to execute its missions; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the Army’s budget and wartime demands be fully funded and that supplemental funding is required for combat and contingency operations and to reset and replace battle losses of equipment; and, be it further

RESOLVED, The Congress will ensure that the Army is fully staffed, trained, and equipped to achieve victory in the War on Terrorism; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress enables the Army to maintain the momentum of key programs while accelerating transformation.

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 between the United States and the Soviet Union had placed a cap on deploying missile defense systems and limited more advanced research on such defensive systems; and

WHEREAS, Work on the underground silos for the first missile interceptors in Alaska began in June 2002 which reflected the urgency to begin moving on a missile defense system; and

WHEREAS, In early 2010, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) acquired the first phase of an initial capability to protect alliance forces against ballistic missile threats; and

WHEREAS, At the November 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon, NATO’s leaders decided to develop a ballistic missile defense (BMD) capability to pursue its core task of collective defense; and

WHEREAS, Allied leaders recognized that the planned deployment of European-based U.S. ballistic-missile defense assets would help protect allies, and agreed that this
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WHEREAS, The imperative to protect America is just as high today when the potential aggressors are rogue states rather than the USSR; and

WHEREAS, As unreliable, hostile nations such as North Korea and Iran seem determined to acquire the capability to deliver a nuclear strike over long distances, including striking the continental United States, the need for a national missile defense as an essential ingredient of our homeland security for the continental United States has become as urgent as ever; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the United States Government to develop and continue to deploy a national missile defense system which is in the national interest of the United States and the American people and an essential ingredient of our homeland security.

Resolution No. 221: Military Occupational Specialty Standards
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion has long recognized the significant role and the contributions of women serving in the military services of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, Women veterans have been eligible for full membership in The American Legion since its founding in 1919, prior to the full franchise of women to vote in presidential elections; and

WHEREAS, There are approximately 205,000 women serving on active duty in the military comprising 15.3% of the total active force, and approximately 130,000 women serving in the National Guard and Reserve comprising 18% of the total Guard and Reserve all serving with distinction, honor, and valor; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the Department of Defense issued an order mandating that women have the same opportunities as men in combat jobs; and

WHEREAS, On April 1, 2016 all military combat professions were open to females; and

WHEREAS, Three females have graduated from Army Ranger School; and

WHEREAS, Women have and still are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan in low intensity combat, truck convoys, military-police units, female engagement teams, where they have interacted and assisted Afghanistan women and a number of other military occupations; and

WHEREAS, Wherever any member of our armed services serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are on the battlefield, which undergoes a constant changing definition, there are no truly secure areas; and

WHEREAS, More than 1,000 female servicemembers have been wounded due to military action in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, A growing number of female servicemembers are suffering from what is termed the “signature wounds” of service in Iraq and Afghanistan, Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury; and

WHEREAS, The Congress and the courts have held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ensures all individuals are treated equally before the law with respect to civilian employment, does not apply to the military profession, no less than seven major
Supreme Court decisions are distilled in these words from Goldman v. Weinberger; “[T]he military is, by necessity, a specialized society [separate] from civilian society…‘The military must insist upon respect for duty and a discipline without counterpart in civilian life,’ in order to prepare for and perform its vital role…The essence of military service ‘is the subordination of the desires and interests of the individual to the needs of the service.’”; and

WHEREAS, Some countries have repealed “combat exclusion policies” in recent years, while others such as the Soviet Union and Israel have maintained their “combat exclusion policies”; and

WHEREAS, Retired Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, former Commander of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, spoke for many Americans when he declared, “Decisions on what roles women should play in war must be based on military standards, not women’s rights”; and

WHEREAS, There are valid concerns about the physical demands required of soldiers to qualify and service in the combat arms; Army and Marine Corps infantry, armor, artillery, Army Special Forces and Navy Seals; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly believes that the Department of Defense and all branches of the military services must maintain the current physical and mental requirements and qualifications for acceptance into military service that have created the best and most respected military in the world; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position specific standard depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.

Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 258 (IL): Selective Service for Women

Foreign Relations Committee
Paul Dillard, Texas, Chairman

Approved Resolutions

Resolution No. 45: Policy on the Arctic Region
Origin: Maine
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States, an Arctic nation, with the thinning and decreasing circumpolar sea ice will experience new security risk and economic opportunities; and

WHEREAS, The Russian Federation in 2015 boosted their Arctic Region presence, stood up the Northern Fleet-Unified Strategic Command, conducted a 2015 joint Arctic land, air, sea and undersea military exercise and restored Arctic air defense not active since the cold war; and

WHEREAS, The United States National Strategy for the Arctic Region emphasizes security and the eight-member circumpolar nation members of the Arctic Council chaired by the United States emphasizes security as key to address issues faced by Arctic governments and native peoples; and

WHEREAS, The thinning and decreasing sea ice will offer increased opportunities to extract untapped oil and natural gas reserves from circumpolar continental shelf, provide shorter shipping routes for establishing trade, offer opportunities for new Arctic trading partners, and open the Arctic to cruise-line tourism; and
WHEREAS, The United States Coast Guard and Navy lack the infrastructure to ensure the security and safety of current or increased Arctic activity; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion express strong support for a national strategy which recognizes the renewed Arctic importance in United States national security; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the President of the United States and both houses of the U. S. Congress to support legislation to advance United States security interests, construction of new heavy polar icebreakers, and promote Arctic region stewardship by strengthening international cooperation and funding to this end.

Resolution No. 89: Taiwan Defense Arms Sales
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Republic of China, also known as Taiwan, is a long-time friend having fought with the United States against Japanese Imperialism during World War II and against communism during the post-war period; and

WHEREAS, The Republic of China is a major trading partner and democratic ally of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is strategically located and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Asia-Pacific region; and

WHEREAS, Under the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8), the United States is committed to provide defense equipment and defense services, in such quantities that the Government of the Republic of China may maintain a sufficient self-defense capability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the sales of the latest American weapon systems, including naval vessels, submarines, military aircraft, high-tech electronics, communications equipment and air-defense missile systems to Republic of China of such quality and in such quantities so as to enable the government of the Republic of China to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports the continued sales of sophisticated U.S. weapon systems, including, but not limited to, F-16 fighter aircraft, antisubmarine equipment and torpedoes, anti-aircraft/anti-missile systems, and electronics and communications equipment to Republic of China; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the government of the Republic of China be given preferential pricing for these items but not equal to that given to the U. S. government, to enable the Republic of China to purchase sufficient quantities of these items for their defense needs.

Resolution No. 90: South China Sea Island Building
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, In the last 18 months, China has constructed more new island surface than all other nations have constructed throughout history and unlike other claimants, China has—at least briefly—placed military equipment on one of its artificial islands; and

WHEREAS, The South China Sea is international water and sovereignty in the area should be determined by the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS); and
WHEREAS, UNCLOS states that countries can’t claim sovereignty over any land masses that are submerged at high tide, or that were previously submerged but have been raised above high tide level by construction; and

WHEREAS, Control of the South China Sea would allow China to dominate a major trade route through which most of its imported oil flows; and

WHEREAS, It would also allow China to disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, trade shipments to all countries in East and Southeast Asia as well as deny access to foreign military forces, particularly the United States; and

WHEREAS, The floor of the South China Sea may contain massive oil and natural gas reserves and sovereignty over the region could give China a level of energy security and independence far beyond what it currently possesses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to use aircraft and naval vessels to assert freedom of navigation in the region, as demonstrated by the recent passage of the USS Fort Worth combat ship and the flight of the U.S. Navy P8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft, over the Chinese construction at Fiery Reef; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support strengthening regional allies through intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities, and provide them with updated military hardware to counter China’s technical advantages in both quantity and quality.

Resolution No. 111: Taiwan Straits Dialogue
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 4 (AK) and Resolution No. 199 (NC))

WHEREAS, The Republic of China (Taiwan) is a long-time friend, ally, and major trading partner of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Republic of China, closely cooperated with the United States against Japanese imperialism during World War II and in the fight against Communism during the Cold War; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is strategically located and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Pacific Rim; and

WHEREAS, It is in the best interests of all parties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resolve political differences peacefully; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the United States government encourages the parties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) to promote peaceful dialogue and avoid any negative actions by either side to change the status quo, which might lead to military conflict.

Resolution No. 171: Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC)
Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) is established in Public Law 106-398, Section 911 which amended Chapter 108 of Title 10, United States Code by adding a new section numbered as § 2166, to enhance security, and promote democratic values, and foster cooperation among the Organization of American States; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the primary missions cited above, the mission of WHINSEC also includes promoting respect for human rights; knowledge and
understanding of U.S. customs and traditions; and training programs covering ethics, the rule of law, international treaties and conventions, international humanitarian law, the military role in democratic societies and civilian control of the military; and

WHEREAS, WHINSEC inherited an unfair and unfortunate reputation from its predecessor, the School of Americas (SOA) and such reputation is being generated by public response to media coverage of claims by a number of human rights activist groups who accused SOA, without any specific cause and effect evidence, of conducting training that had influenced a total of eight military leaders from Central and South America to commit serious human rights violations and crimes against their fellow citizens, long after leaving SOA and serving in much higher positions of responsibility in corrupted governments; and

WHEREAS, WHINSEC and the Department of Defense have long maintained that no school should be held accountable for the actions of only a minute number of its large number of its graduates; and

WHEREAS, American Legion representatives visited WHINSEC in June 2008 and observed ethics and human rights courses being conducted and met with students from South and Central America who expressed appreciation for the training in American alliances, cooperation, democracy, living in free societies and traditional American values; and

WHEREAS, During their WHINSEC visit, The American Legion representatives observed the personal relationships and bonding developed between and among the WHINSEC faculty, the international military students and U.S. military students training along with the international military students and how effectively, therefore, WHINSEC is building the kind of partnering with other nations and their military, police, and first responders that is deemed as an essential element of national power to use in the long fight against extremist terrorism, as well as a very cost effective way to build improved relationships and the international partnering needed for success in the prolonged war against extremist terrorism; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Secretary of Defense to ensure that the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) is adequately funded on the basis that hemispheric training, alliance building, and the sharing of knowledge among the Organization of American States is a vital interest to the U.S. in terms of the establishment of alliances, hemispheric cooperation and national security; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls on Congress to ensure that such funding be restricted for use only for those purposes included in the mission statement of WHINSEC; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress and the Secretary of Defense to establish similar institutes for other regions of the world where international mutual cooperation and alliance building can be beneficial to the vital interests of the United States.

Resolution No. 172: Support for World Press Freedom

Origin: Iowa

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, In a democratic society the essential right of the press (print and electronic) to report on government activities, social movements, scientific developments, and other significant events or breakthroughs is one of the basic pillars of our Bill of Rights; and
WHEREAS, Such reporting and expression of speech helps to ensure the transparency of the political and social systems that are in place and that an informed and educated public can more effectively participate politically; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes that oppressive and restrictive regimes around the world work to deter, manipulate or out-rightly deny their citizens the ability to get unfettered information, or to allow free press to investigate and report in those countries; and

WHEREAS, Department of State and U.S. government news media organizations under the Broadcast Board of Governors such as: The Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio Martí TV, and Middle East Broadcasting Network, are essential news resources to countries whose domestic news sources are oppressed or restricted; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the President and Congress to designate and provide appropriate funding for the Department of State and U.S. government news media organizations under the Broadcast Board of Governors such as: The Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio Martí TV, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports international press freedom and the protection of international journalists who report and investigate news throughout the world.

Resolution No. 173: Secure National Borders Against Illegal Drugs
Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The borders that separate the United States, Canada, and Mexico are relatively open; and

WHEREAS, There are rising concerns among U.S. officials regarding the deteriorating security situation which allows significant smuggling of drugs, illegal immigrants, and other contraband across our borders; and

WHEREAS, The violence on the Mexican border has caused a change in smuggling from that area to other parts of our national borders such as Canada and our sea coast; and

WHEREAS, The Mexican government, while attempting to control the problem, is not able to counter the drug cartels due to being out-manned and out-gunned; and

WHEREAS, The United States has the capability to provide assistance to the Mexican government that would allow it to reestablish control and eliminate the drug cartels; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the President’s and Congress’ efforts to provide assistance and aid to the Canadian and Mexican governments to secure the borders separating the United States, Canada, and Mexico from trafficking illegal drugs across those borders.

Resolution No. 174: Security of Overseas Embassies
Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States has 294 embassies and consulates distributed around the globe; and

WHEREAS, Many of these embassies and consulates are located in countries that are hostile towards our culture and way of life; and

WHEREAS, The soil on which they occupy is sovereign territory of the United States; and
WHEREAS, The men and women who serve our country by representing us in these locations deserve the highest level of security we can offer; and

WHEREAS, In the wake of the recent murder of our ambassador to Libya and three other Americans in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012, marking the first United States ambassador death to a violent act since 1979; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the United States government review, and if necessary, take measures at all United States embassies and consulates to ensure the safety and security of all United States diplomatic personnel against our enemies and terrorists.

Resolution No. 175: Oppose Iran Nuclear Deal
Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion views nuclear weapons development and proliferation a critical threat to national security; and

WHEREAS, Allowing Iran to develop or acquire a nuclear weapon would destabilize the entire Middle East and pose an eminent threat to Israel; and

WHEREAS, The Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a non-binding executive agreement which was signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between Iran, and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, and Germany (also known as the P5+1) along with the European Union; and

WHEREAS, The JCPOA allows Iran to retain its nuclear infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, Under the JCPOA, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will have 24-hour access to Iran’s declared nuclear sites but will be faced with a stipulated 24-day notification and appeal period when requesting access to Iran’s military facilities or undeclared sites or suspected sites— thereby possibly allowing Iran to hide, remove or transport nuclear-weapon materials and operations in a clandestine manner; and

WHEREAS, Not all verification and monitoring mechanisms are defined in the JCPOA; and

WHEREAS, Important verification and monitoring mechanisms have been defined in agreements made solely between the IAEA and Iran separate and apart from the JCPOA and these same verification and monitoring agreements remain undisclosed to Congress or the Administration for review; and

WHEREAS, Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran were extinguished in 1980 and therefore U.S. citizens are prohibited from being a part of any IAEA inspection team located in Iran; and

WHEREAS, The JCPOA removes a United Nations embargo prohibiting conventional weapons exports to Iran in five years and ballistic missile technology in eight years; and

WHEREAS, Ending the conventional-weapons embargo would permit Russia to sell Iran ballistic missiles which have the capability to reach Israel and overseas targets; and

WHEREAS, By lifting U.S. and international sanctions in accordance with the JCPOA, an estimated $100 billion will be released to Iran which may be used to fund terrorism against Americans, American interests and allies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress not to lift any sanctions in connection with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal until such agreement is amended by including all verification and monitoring mechanisms as well as including a provision stipulating unconditional access to every aspect of Iran’s nuclear program—whether declared or undeclared—to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency.
and that these amendments are ultimately agreed to in a timely manner by Iran and the P5+1; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the United States of America be prepared to exercise all options, up to and including military action, in the interest of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Resolution No. 201: Enhanced Funding for USAID
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Department of State is the first line of defense in combating the myriad security threats that face America from abroad, and is charged with a number of missions that are vital to the nation; and

WHEREAS, These missions include: diplomatic relations with foreign nations, promoting peace and stability in regions of vital interest, bringing countries together to address global challenges, creating jobs at home by opening markets abroad, and helping developing nations establish stable economic environments that provide investment and export opportunities; and

WHEREAS, In recent years the State Department’s responsibilities have expanded enormously to include combating threats from terrorism, international crime, and narcotics trafficking, and that development programs through the U.S. Agency for International Development are in the frontline to offer solutions and alternatives for emerging states to prevent their economic and democratic failure; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support policies and legislation that increase funding for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) within the Department of State and seek use of that funding towards targeted states whose failure to provide for its people could result in the expansion of international terrorism; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That USAID, because of its technical knowledge and expertise, be given a greater role in the decision-making process for the disbursement and usage of funds targeted for reconstruction in nations in which our military presence resulted in the need for infrastructure redevelopment.

Resolution No. 202: Military Retiree Mail at Overseas Embassies
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, As of January 1, 2010 the Department of State has said it cannot be responsible for the costs of mail going to military retirees at embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions; and

WHEREAS, This decision has adversely affected the quality-of-life of U.S. military retirees and veterans living abroad; and

WHEREAS, This new policy has negatively impacted veterans’ personal lives and will likely result in prohibitive costs in addition to potential unreliable delivery of medications, compensation, absentee ballots, legal correspondence and other important personal documents from Federal, state and local government agencies; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense cannot pay the Department of State for the delivery of retiree mail on the basis of the Anti-Deficiency Act (31 U.S.C. § 1341); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly urges Congress to change any necessary laws to permit the Department of Defense to fund the cost of essential mail service delivered to military retirees at embassies, consulates, diplomatic missions or other U.S. government facilities.
Resolution No. 204: Policy on Latin and Central America
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Over the past decade the nations of Central America have made great strides toward establishing democratic societies; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has taken a great interest in supporting democracy, development, and security in this area so close to our borders and strategically situated between the naval lifeline between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Panama Canal, and one of our major trading partners, Mexico; and

WHEREAS, In the light of the decreasing threat from subversion in Central America as well as budget restrictions in the United States, it is inevitable that U.S. aid to Central America must be reduced; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the U.S. government to continue economic aid to friendly, democratic Central American nations which are seeking to develop democratic societies with market economies; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion recommend the U.S. government provide minimal amounts of military aid while urging Central American nations to adopt the model of Costa Rica and Panama and disband military forces and rely solely on police forces for internal security, thus freeing funds for development and contributing to peaceful relations in the region.

Resolution No. 205: Foreign Policy Objectives
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Members of The American Legion, as veterans of wartime service in the defense of liberty, have a special concern for maintaining peace with freedom and recognize that a strong U.S. foreign policy is vital in that regard; and

WHEREAS, The official concern of The American Legion stems from that part of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion which states: “We associate ourselves together … to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion believes that the following objectives should be incorporated into U.S. foreign policy in order to maintain peace with freedom while preserving and promoting democracy:

1. Recognition that the U.S. has great and multiple responsibilities as a leader of the Free World
2. Dedication to achievement of world peace with freedom, secured by a peace through strength posture
3. Support for a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism
4. Support for democracy and human rights in other countries when such is consistent with U.S. national interests and national power
5. Participation in essential collective security alliances, provided our allies contribute their fair share
6. Negotiation of equitable, verifiable arms control agreements, which improve U.S. national security
7. Opposition to the spread of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons or long-range ballistic missiles which may be used by terrorists, terrorist organizations, communists or aggressor nations
8. Determined opposition to international terrorism and drug trafficking
9. Support for responsible international organizations that are consistent with U.S. sovereignty and serve U.S. national interests
10. Participation in an increasingly interdependent Free World trading system based on fair and equitable trading practices
11. Recognition that the President must be the chief architect of U.S. foreign policy as envisioned in the U.S. Constitution, while Congress performs important functions of advice, oversight and funding
12. Support for the appropriate resources to promote and protect U.S. vital national interests world-wide.

Resolution No. 206: Middle East/Gulf States Foreign Policies
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The end of World War I brought about the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the arbitrary delineation of the middle eastern states of the former Turkish held territories of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine (Israel), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Aden, Oman, (United Arab Emirates), and the Gulf of Aden states of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan, and to include the sovereign states of Egypt and Libya; and

WHEREAS, Many of these nations continue to struggle with reforming from authoritarian regimes to more democratic and representative forms of governance; and that the call by their own populations to seek greater freedoms and the protection of individual human rights and universal suffrage must be heard; and that states which fail to provide the basic needs of their people creates an opportunity for extremists and terrorists to flourish and grow; and

WHEREAS, That as each of these nations strives to reform their government they will need the technical and economic support of more developed and advanced representative democracies, and these needs will include: creating diplomatic coalitions with other countries and international institutions, creating jobs, open market reforms, developing and establishing stable economic environments, achieving internal and international security cooperation; and

WHEREAS, The President and Congress have both called for a policy that will help promote and assist nations seeking to establish greater democratic reforms in the Middle East; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation and foreign policy that specifically targets diplomatic, economic, and educational programs to promote greater and peaceful democratic reforms in countries within the Arabian Gulf and Middle Eastern Region.

Resolution No. 207: Policy on the United Nations
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion played a significant role in helping to establish the United Nations after World War II, believing it would help prevent the outbreak of future wars; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has remained generally supportive of the United Nations over the succeeding years, although it has been critical of particular ineffective, wasteful, or undesirable activities of the United Nations; and

WHEREAS, Countries with vast national budget surpluses are exploiting their working citizens for unfair economic leverage in the United Nations; and

WHEREAS, The current scale of assessments, which weighs and considers the “low per capita income” of each member nation, determines the funding structure of the United Nations, is inequitable to the United States; and
WHEREAS, Although the United Nations in half a century of operation has not fulfilled the lofty purposes of international peace and human betterment envisioned by its founders, it continues to be in the national interest for the United States to function as a member of the United Nations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to use American leverage to encourage the United Nations to focus on limited, necessary, achievable tasks that truly better the lot of humankind in a sensible, cost effective manner; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress encourage the United Nations not to infringe on national sovereignty when operating economic and social programs; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress encourage the United Nations to recalculate the assessment of nations’ funding obligations to be based on the gross national product of each country with no “low per capita income” factor to distort the proportion of such obligations; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That in the absence of such reform of the funding formula the United Nations should adopt a weighted voting strength based on the funds contributed by each member nation; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That truly independent authority be provided to the UN Inspector General and ensure that United Nations agencies become subject to periodic, unannounced auditing, the findings of such audits to be reported to member nations; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That an equitable fiduciary relationship be established between the United States and United Nations.

Resolution No. 208: Prohibit Foreign Investments in U.S. Defense Industry
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, In this era of changing technology, the United States must maintain ownership and control of critical defense industries so that U.S. technological secrets can be protected and adequate production facilities can be maintained to meet any national emergency; and

WHEREAS, The generally declining strength of the dollar and the downsizing of our industrial base in the 1990s and the continuing decline in the 2000s have made it very lucrative for foreign entities to purchase U.S. firms, including those involved in national defense production; and

WHEREAS, Some allies of the United States, which lease or purchase U.S. advanced technology, may transfer or resell to actual or potential enemies of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Such technology transfers threaten the security of sensitive U.S. military technologies and U.S. technological superiority; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the U.S. government to ensure that foreign entities are not permitted to own critical industries, especially those involved in producing defense items; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion opposes the transfer and sales of sensitive technologies which may endanger our national security and economic interests.

Resolution No. 210: Support for the American Battle Monuments Commission
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of war veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and
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WHEREAS, The American Battle Monuments Commission was established by law in 1923 as an independent agency of the executive branch of the United States government; and

WHEREAS, The American Battle Monuments Commission was charged to erect suitable memorial shrines, for designing, constructing, operating and maintaining permanent United States military cemeteries and memorials in foreign countries; and

WHEREAS, These United States military cemeteries have been established throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, These cemeteries are hallowed grounds for America’s war dead; and

WHEREAS, Funding reductions for the maintenance of the United States military cemeteries in foreign countries has created reductions in human resources, equipment and supplies; and

WHEREAS, United States military cemeteries exist in foreign countries today, which are in need of adequate funding for repair, maintenance, additional manpower and other functions necessary to preserve the integrity of all World War I and World War II cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, Visitation numbers are increasing annually at United States military cemeteries overseas; and

WHEREAS, This resolution had been approved by the National Executive Committee at the Spring 1998 meetings; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the United States Congress to appropriate adequate funding and human resources to the American Battle Monuments Commission in order to properly maintain and preserve the final resting place of America’s war dead located on foreign soil.

Resolution No. 211: Securing Pakistan’s Nuclear Arsenal
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Pakistan is a long-time ally, which has partnered with the United States against terrorist threats in Iraq and Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror; and

WHEREAS, Pakistan's nuclear program is a vital concern to U.S. national security, due to the close proximity to al-Qaida and Taliban insurgents as well as suspected Islamist sympathizers imbedded within Pakistan’s army; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion seeks to deter the possibility of terrorists gaining access to nuclear weapons as the potential for the intersection of terrorism and nuclear weapons is arguably the greatest threat to U.S. national security; and

WHEREAS, In an effort to prevent the infiltration of a nuclear establishment by individuals sympathetic to al-Qaida goals, the U.S. must construct and implement policies that proactively thwart the unwelcome possibility of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the President and the Congress to carefully formulate and execute policies toward Pakistan in order to deter the possibility of terrorists gaining access to nuclear weapons; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the U.S. should seek to provide assistance to Pakistan in implementing programs that will improve security and effective accountability at nuclear facilities thereby transforming Pakistan from a source of insecurity in the Middle East to a country committed to eliminating terrorism, and ensuring security from nuclear proliferation.
Resolution No. 212: Vietnam Human Rights  
Origin: North Carolina  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes the comradeship and loyalty of the ethnic minorities of Vietnam to include, Montagnards and Hmong hill people, whose assistance was invaluable during the Vietnam War; and  

WHEREAS, Members of The American Legion, as veterans of wartime service in the defense of liberty, have a special concern for maintaining peace with freedom and recognize that the protection of human rights are vital in that regard; and  

WHEREAS, Since diplomatic and trade relations have been established over the last 20 years and normalized between the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the condition of tribal people who assisted United States forces during the Vietnam conflict has greatly worsened in terms of persecution; and  

WHEREAS, The official concern of The American Legion stems from that part of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion which states: "We associate ourselves together...to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy"; now, therefore, be it  

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the President and the Congress to support legislation and policies that will compel the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to meet the international standards of human rights; and, be it further  

RESOLVED, That the ethnic and religious minorities within the country of Vietnam be extended those protections and rights to live and worship in peace without threat of imprisonment or retribution from their government; and, be it further  

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to take such measures as are necessary to overcome the jamming of Radio Free Asia by the government of Vietnam; and, be it further  

RESOLVED, That educational and cultural exchange programs with Vietnam should promote progress toward freedom and democracy; and, be it finally  

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to create a U.S. policy that will offer refugee resettlement to Vietnam nationals (including members of the Montagnard ethnic minority groups) who were eligible for the Humanitarian Resettlement program, the Orderly Departure program, the Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Returnees program, the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988, or any other U.S. refugee program, but who were deemed ineligible for reasons of administrative error, to include inaccurate language translation or certain circumstances beyond their control.

Resolution No. 213: Support for Foreign Exchange Education Programs  
Origin: North Carolina  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  

WHEREAS, The United States, Mexico, and Central and South America are historic, regional neighbors with a common heritage and thousands of miles of common boundaries; and  

WHEREAS, The Congress and the executive branch have entered into the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico; and  

WHEREAS, College scholarships and educational exchanges help reduce social, cultural, and international barriers and promote good will and understanding; now, therefore, be it  

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge
Congress to increase financial and political support for existing international education exchange and scholarship programs, such as: the Fulbright, Gilman, and other programs, offered through the Departments of State and Education which will increase cooperative endeavors on all fronts to enhance the prosperity and security of those nations participating; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the U.S. government to expand the number of scholarships for Mexico, Central America, and South America, particularly for those highly qualified students, who lack funds to attend undergraduate and appropriate vocational-technical programs, provided said students promise to abide by current or future immigration student visa policies after completing their education or program requirements.

Resolution No. 214: Global Trade Policies
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, China and other trade countries have purchased billions of dollars’ worth of U.S. Government bonds, stock market shares, and individual companies with their windfall money from our trade deficit as a result of Congress approving the “World Free Trade” policy a number of years ago; and

WHEREAS, China and other trade countries have not adhered to the global trade rules initially agreed to in the treaty relating to import fees and tariffs resulting with below reasonable costs of the products in the U.S. and higher prices of U.S. products sold in their countries; and

WHEREAS, Revenues realized by other countries from these trade imbalances have resulted in greater purchasing power and the potential for foreign ownership of essential industries and corporations vital to our basic national security interests and infrastructure; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the President and Congress to balance trade deficits by pursuing the enforcement of the conditions of the trade negotiations made in good faith with these nations and support the efforts of our trade negotiators and diplomatic officials to use every avenue available through the World Trade Organization and the International Court of Justice to pursue our nation’s claims for fair trade practices.

Resolution No. 222: Policy on Africa
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Decades of colonization, authoritarian rule, severe economic disparity, internal conflicts, rampant corruption, and, in many cases, great resistance to change have overwhelmed the African continent; and

WHEREAS, Today some African nations are beginning to develop strong economic markets, and are making determined efforts to put the continent towards a solid democratic course with multi-party systems and other significant political changes; and

WHEREAS, Promoting policies that support democracy, conflict resolution, economic development, free and open trade, and disease prevention in African countries are in the national interests of the United States, understanding that a major contributing factor to terrorism are failed states; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio August 30, 31, September 1, 2016. That The American Legion supports bipartisan policies and legislation that identify areas and authorize and fund programs where the United States can provide economic, political, and social development in Africa; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion believes such U.S. policies toward African nations must be intertwined with our nation’s overall strategy to promote democracy throughout the world; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That any African nation that clearly demonstrates open democratic reforms, human rights protection, and cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, will have the support of the U.S. government.

Resolution No. 223: Policy on Cuba
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The communist government of Cuba has ruined the Cuban economy, repressed the Cuban people, provided a base for forces inimical to the United States, and committed aggression in many lands; and

WHEREAS, Following the demise of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe, Cuba has lost the sources of foreign subsidies that alone sustained its inefficient communist economy; and

WHEREAS, Cuba and the United States restored diplomatic relations on 20 July 2015, which had been severed in 1961 during the Cold War; and

WHEREAS, If the Free World remains firm in its rejection of communism in Cuba, many economic, social, and political indicators point to the likely collapse of the Castro dictatorship in Cuba; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the U.S. government to continue to maintain control of Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, continue intelligence flights over Cuba, remain firm in opposition to the export of revolution by Cuba, continue broadcasting true news and information to the Cuban people, and encourage the development of democracy and a free market economy in Cuba.

Approved with Amendments

Resolution No. 88: POW/MIA Policies
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)

WHEREAS, American service members and civilians remain missing or otherwise unaccounted for from America’s past wars and conflicts, and reports indicate that cases of Americans last known alive, information regarding their fates is still illusive; and

WHEREAS, The families of POW/MIAs suffer untold uncertainty due to the lack of information about and accounting for their missing loved one, often in spite of heroic efforts by U.S. specialists; and

WHEREAS, The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2010 called upon the Secretary of Defense to provide funds, personnel, and resources to significantly increase the capability and capacity of the Department of Defense (DOD) to account for missing persons so that, beginning with fiscal year 2015, at least 200 missing persons are accounted for annually under the program; and

WHEREAS, Improvements in foreign government cooperation have helped identify locations of incident sites that may enable remains of US personnel to be recovered and identified by the U.S. Government; and

WHEREAS, Promising advances in scientific DNA capabilities and other identification techniques involving radiographic comparison and facial superimposition have dramatically increased the U.S. Government’s ability to identify remains of
unaccounted for servicemen and civilians for whom identification had not earlier been possible; and

WHEREAS, Each member of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community plays a vital role in the mission to account for missing and unaccounted for U.S. servicemen and civilians from our nation’s past wars and conflicts; and

WHEREAS, The Secretary of Defense recently directed “complete reorganization” of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community, a consolidation encouraging to family members and veterans, though close scrutiny for viability will continue to be required; and

WHEREAS, The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency was formed as a result of the Defense Secretary’s directive for “complete reorganization” and is responsible for policy control and operational implementation to achieve the fullest possible accounting for missing U.S. personnel; and

WHEREAS, The POW/MIA accounting effort should continue to be a matter of highest national priority until all reasonable actions have been taken to achieve the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. personnel; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion fully supports and advocates for the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans, in every country, on every continent; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes U.S. Government POW/MIA operations, though currently still inadequate, are achieving substantial progress; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion remains steadfast in our commitment to the goal of achieving the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. military personnel and designated civilian personnel missing and unaccounted for from our nation’s past wars and conflicts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the President and members of Congress to speak out on every occasion on the need to expedite the return of U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for, regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the President and Congress to support legislation and policies that will sustain use of all necessary resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing American service members and designated civilians regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide full funding for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to meet requirements for personnel and operations to achieve accounting goals and to ensure these funds not be redirected by the DOD for any other purpose; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to continue to declassify all POW/MIA information (except that revealing intelligence sources or methods) in a form readily available to the affected families and for public review; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to establish a joint standing congressional committee on POW/MIA affairs to oversee plans and policies to ensure continued priority by the executive branch in addressing requirements to achieve the POW/MIA accounting goals; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President to strengthen the US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs, and to initiate similar such commissions with the People’s Republic of China, and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to increase POW/MIA accounting and recovery efforts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to continue taking favorable steps with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as Hanoi increases efforts to provide the fullest possible accounting for US personnel still missing in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia controlled by Vietnam during the Vietnam War; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That "fullest possible accounting" is defined as the releasing live prisoners, repatriating remains of those killed in action or who died in captivity, or providing convincing evidence as to why neither is possible.

Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 232 (WV): Pause/Hold Syrian Refugees Importation/Immigration to the United States of America
Resolution No. 234 (FL): U. S. and China Relations

Law and Order & Homeland Security
George Wehrli, Florida, Chairman

Approved

Resolution No. 16: Second Amendment
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As Amended)

WHEREAS, All members of The American Legion are wartime veterans who believe in the precepts of the Constitution of the United States; and
WHEREAS, At more than one time in the lives of these self-same veterans, he/she has sworn to “…uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States…” and upon entering the military include the phrase – “…against all enemies, both foreign and domestic; and
WHEREAS, In several states individual state laws have been created encroaching upon our “rights” under the Constitution; specifically, in abrogation of the Second Amendment; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is the largest veterans service organization in the world, being an effective voice against tyranny; and
WHEREAS, For the sake of all who have served in the military of the United States, and for the sake of our youth – the future of our country – The American Legion seeks to remind the elected senators and representatives of their obligation to listen to and vote in line with the wishes of their constituents; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the United States should enforce the will of the citizens; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That those states, which have passed restrictive legislation, in deference to the Second Amendment, issue repeals at their earliest opportunity to reverse these unfair/unrepresented firearm “regulations” which are in opposition to our rights under the Constitution.

Resolution No. 18: Support Research and Funding for Alternative Energy Resources
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Our growing dependence on foreign oil adversely affects the United States and world economies as was discovered during the oil embargo in 1973 and interruption in the supply of foreign oil during the years of conflict between Iran and Iraq; and
WHEREAS, There is a growing need for creating new employment for the American people and developing new skills especially for our veteran population; and
WHEREAS, The development of alternate energy sources is vital to America’s maintaining a competitive advantage in the world economy; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to fund research and development of all alternative sources of energy including the utilization of coal; crude oil; oil shale; natural gas; wind; and solar energy as well as nuclear energy to ensure our nation will never be an economic hostage and we can always meet the ever growing competition from China and other Far Eastern industrial complexes and the European Common Market; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the federal government be strongly encouraged to substantially expand its incentives to industry, either through tax incentives or through research and development grants, in a greatly expanded effort to develop.

Resolution No. 20: Fully Enforce Immigration Laws
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Each sovereign nation is responsible for enforcement of laws regarding its borders; and
WHEREAS, Citizens of each sovereign nation should be protected from those who violate their borders; and
WHEREAS, The United States has laws specifying means to obtain legal means to enter our nation; and
WHEREAS, These immigration laws are being violated each day by persons entering our nation and endangering our national security; and
WHEREAS, There are existing means to arrest, detain, or deport those who violate these immigration laws; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the strict enforcement of immigration laws already in existence; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That benefits of any kind should not be granted to those immigrants who have gained access to our nation in an illegal manner.

Resolution No. 21: Support for Financial Anti-Terrorism Law Enforcement
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Internal Revenue Service are the first line of defense of the nation in combating financial security threats that face America from both home and abroad, and are charged with a number of missions that are vital to the security of the nation; and
WHEREAS, These missions include: policing, investigation, and enforcement of financial laws to ensure the integrity and stability of our nation’s banking and financial institutions from both foreign and domestic abuse or manipulation, and to ensure a stable economic environment that provides for legal investment and export opportunities; and
WHEREAS, These departments and agencies are charged with the role of securing both the physical and cyber borders of our nation, and while mindful of the constitutional rights of American citizens; and
WHEREAS, Financial investigations and prosecutions conducted by the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Internal Revenue Service have uncovered illicit financing schemes and revenue accounts of listed terrorist organizations through knowing or unknowing individuals, investment development groups, associations, charitable, and other legitimate organizations; and
WHEREAS, These departments and agencies must have the ability to use every legal tool and policy at their disposal to ensure that terrorist organizations do not have the ability to be financed through domestic and international financial systems; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports legislation that strengthens the abilities of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security and the Internal Revenue Service to police, investigate, and prosecute financial institutions or individuals within the parameters of the Constitution that use legitimate and illegitimate financial means to help support both domestic and international terrorism.

Resolution No. 24: Illegal Immigration Policy
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimates that there are 11.5 million illegal immigrants who currently reside within the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Homeland Security, Office of Audits stated that each year more than one million aliens attempt to illegally enter the United States without proper documentation or enter legally and violate the provisions of their visa; and

WHEREAS, A need exists for a broad exchange of intelligence and related action between regulatory agencies which govern immigration policy, social services, and the Department of Justice; and

WHEREAS, Aggressively tracking foreign nationals is a deterrent to terrorist activities and failing to effectively utilize the available systems and technology to track illegal aliens threatens the security and future of the U.S.; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to adopt an immigration reform policy which emphasizes border security against those individuals attempting to enter this country illegally and internal tracking of all resident aliens and illegal immigrants; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose legislation that would result in the granting of amnesty and legal residency, in any form or by any name, to illegal immigrants currently in the United States; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Department of Homeland Security be provided the monies necessary to ensure both the thorough performance of its responsibilities and the security of the borders of the United States; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose any change to “Title V of the Immigration and Nationality Act” (8 U.S.C. 1531-1537) that would require revealing the source(s) of secret evidence used in the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, administrative deportation hearings; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages the federal government to provide the needed resources to enforcement agencies tasked with curtailing illegal immigration in this country and encourage the Congress of the United States to mandate that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Information System continue and be aggressively administered by the responsible agency of the federal government; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to provide agencies of the federal government with the necessary resources to track the arrival and departure of foreign nationals to the United States; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages a thorough background check and interview for each candidate for a U.S. visa prior to issuing said visa; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That those foreign nationals who perpetrate fraud and/or are visa overstays be arrested by law enforcement and turned over to the Department of Homeland Security for removal/deportation proceedings; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages Congress to pass legislation prohibiting the acceptance of foreign-issued forms of identification deemed untrustworthy by the federal government for application for government-sponsored public services, and that businesses, including financial institutions, be prohibited from accepting foreign-issued documents determined to be unacceptable forms of identification; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages Congress to authorize and fund the securing of the borders and points of entry in the United States by: construction of physical barriers; hiring a sufficient number of U.S. Border Patrol Agents; federalization of National Guard troops to assist border security operations; searching all vessel and their cargo arriving at our seaports; enforcement of existing laws and passing of new laws to reduce the illegal immigrant population; and the funding of the Department of Homeland Security to ensure its effectiveness in securing borders of the United States; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion encourages Congress, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security to take necessary action to stop the flow of illegal immigration into this country by means that include, but are not limited to: requiring all legal aliens to carry U.S. Government-issued identification documents; enacting measures that effectively halt the smuggling of illegal immigrants into this country; granting law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal levels the authority to work together and with the Department of Homeland Security to apprehend and incarcerate illegal immigrants; and the utilization of military resources as appropriate to assist in stopping the flow of illegal aliens in to this country.

Resolution No. 26: Pipeline Construction and Energy Independence
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Our republic is in a state of emergency and our people are no longer secure in their “unalienable rights” to “liberty and the pursuit of happiness”; and
WHEREAS, All subsidies distorted the efficient and equitable function of our capitalistic economic system and encourage crony-capitalism; and
WHEREAS, Our current recession is exacerbated by the high cost of energy; and
WHEREAS, We have sufficient energy resources within our borders to make our nation energy independent for decades and centuries if we construct third and fourth generation nuclear power plants; and
WHEREAS, The development of our energy resources would greatly increase national security, create jobs, and facilitate paying down our national debt, which now exceeds our gross domestic product and threatens the collapse of our nation; and
WHEREAS, Despite the January 2014 State Department report which managed to conclude that the proposed pipeline Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and other points won’t significantly increase oil-sands production or worsen climate change, President Obama is still waiting to hear from other federal agencies before deciding to issue the necessary presidential permit in lieu of an approved veto-proof bill from Congress; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion call
upon Congress and the President to expedite the approval and construction of a pipeline from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and other points as a step toward greater U.S. energy independence along with allowing the development of all viable energy resources; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion call upon Congress and the President to phase out all subsidies and tax loop-holes in connection with this transcontinental energy project; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That all duplicative and nonessential regulations in connection with this transcontinental energy project be revoked.

Resolution No. 30: Support for U.S. Blood Banks
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The public needs to be constantly reminded that the blood banks of the United States need to be supported by The American Legion and the public; and

WHEREAS, Emergencies continue to come up where blood is needed without warning; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion continues its support of blood banks to cover such emergencies; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continues promoting the donation of blood for all emergencies where lives are at stake.

Resolution No. 31: Buy American
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of wartime service veterans which pledges to foster and perpetuate one hundred percent Americanism; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense contracts with large corporations and small businesses for the construction and repair of military hardware to include ground systems, armaments, aircraft and other systems for all of our military branches; and

WHEREAS, These government contractors may rely on subcontractors for the production and overhaul of individual components and subsystems to be used in these equipment items; and

WHEREAS, The government contractor manufacturing a system or systems may choose to employ the services of subcontractors located in foreign countries rather than those subcontractors which have comparable equipment and comparable costs in this country; and

WHEREAS, The choices made by the government contractor not only can affect the security of our nation as well as the employment of many Americans and veterans who may work at these subcontractors at both the originating and overhaul facilities located in the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to require government contractors to utilize American-made components and subsystems in construction and repair of their equipment over those made by foreign subcontractors for use by the United States military to ensure the defense of the country as well as the continued employment of Americans and veterans at subcontractor facilities.
Resolution No. 33: Rare Earth Elements

Origin: Nebraska

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Rare earth elements are a collection of 17 elements that are critical to civilian and military high technology applications: Scandium; Yttrium; Lanthanum; Cerium; Praseodymium; Neodymium; Promethium; Samarium; Europium; Gadolinium; Terbium; Dysprosium; Holmium; Erbium; Thulium; Ytterbium; and Lutetium; and

WHEREAS, Rare earth elements are distributed globally, with 36 percent of known reserves located in China, and 13 percent located in the United States; and

WHEREAS, China now produces 97 percent of the world’s rare earth elements, key components in a large assortment of advanced technologies, and increasing global demand along with Chinese government reductions in export quotas over the past six years have led to international concerns about future supply shortages; and

WHEREAS, Some U.S. weapons and equipment that contain rare-earth elements are: Predator unmanned aerial vehicles, Tomahawk cruise missiles, Zumwalt-class destroyers, night vision goggles, smart bombs, and sonar transducers as well as other sophisticated military applications including guidance and control systems; advanced optics technologies; radar and radiation detection equipment; and advanced communications; and

WHEREAS, China may use its monopoly over rare earths to leverage its influence on U.S. foreign policy, and numerous analysts have expressed concerns that Chinese quota reductions will increase U.S. element dependence; and

WHEREAS, The Government Accountability Office released a report in February 2016 to Congress outlining how developing a comprehensive approach could help the Department of Defense (DoD) better manage national security risks in the supply chain; and

WHEREAS, Given that DoD’s assessment of future supply and demand was based on previous estimates using 2010 data, there could be new concern for a possible rare earth material supply shortage or vulnerability that could affect national security; and

WHEREAS, Dependence on foreign sources alone for rare earths may pose a national security threat; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to continue to require the Department of Defense to provide regular assessments of the needs of the U.S. rare earth supply-chain for defense and require the Defense Secretary to have a long-term rare-earth supply plan in the interest of national defense.

Resolution No. 56: Protection, Preservation and Retention of Federal and Military Monuments in the United States

Origin: Wyoming

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

(Consolidated with Resolution No. 27 (NE))

WHEREAS, At different times through history there have been attempts by either the Filipino government or other groups to petition the United States government for the return of the church bells taken by American military forces from the belfry of the church in Balangiga, Samar, Philippines; and

WHEREAS, Any return of a federal or military monument by the United States of America would set a negative and dangerous precedent on any and all federal or military monuments; and

WHEREAS, Military monuments honor those servicemen and servicewomen whose sacrifice for the United States of America has preserved the nation and recognizes those who have sacrificed their lives in service to their country; and
WHEREAS, Returning any military monument should never be considered as contributing to the enhancement or reaffirmation of any friendly relationship with foreign countries; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Congress of the United States to establish such laws to preserve, protect and retain all federal and military monuments within the United States from any foreign government or religious or der who attempts to have any federal and military monument removed from the United States of America.

Resolution No. 99: Support for the Jones Maritime Act and Related Cabotage Laws Origin: Maryland Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always stressed that maintaining a viable U.S.-Flag Merchant Marine and its supporting infrastructure is essential to the economic, national, and environmental security of this nation; and

WHEREAS, The American policy of the United States, as articulated in the 1936 Merchant Marine Act, states that “it is necessary for the national defense and development of its foreign and domestic commerce that the United States shall have a Merchant Marine”; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is concerned about the continued decline of the U.S.-Flag Merchant Marine and the shortage of trained American mariners; and

WHEREAS, As of 2010, the privately owned ocean-going U.S.-flag fleet consisted of only 192 active ships, which included 97 ships in domestic trade and only 95 U.S.-Flag ships that operated in international trade in support of the nation’s economic and national security interests; and

WHEREAS, The United States is the world’s largest trading nation, but only three percent of U.S. imports and exports are carried in U.S.-flag ships which is economically unwise and militarily imprudent; and

WHEREAS, The Jones Act, which is critical to United States national security and to America’s economic well-being, should be reaffirmed annually; and

WHEREAS, On October 8, 1996, the President signed the Maritime Security Act of 1996 establishing the Maritime Security Program (MSP) for Fiscal Years (FY) 1996 through 2005 and on November 24, 2003, the President signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, which contained the Maritime Security Act of 2003 (MSA 2003) reauthorizing the MSP for FY 2006 through FY 2015; and

WHEREAS, The MSA 2003 requires that the Secretary of Transportation, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, to establish a fleet of active, commercially viable, militarily useful, privately-owned vessels to meet national defense and other security requirements; and

WHEREAS, MSA 2003 authorized $156 million annually for FYs 2006, 2007, and 2008; $174 million annually for FYs 2009, 2010, and 2011; and $186 million annually for FYs 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 to support the operation of 60 U.S.-flag vessels in the foreign commerce of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Participating operators are required to make their ships and commercial transportation resources available upon request by the Secretary of Defense during times of war or national emergency; and

WHEREAS, The MSP maintains a modern U.S.-flag fleet providing military access to vessels and vessel capacity, as well as a total global, intermodal transportation network and this network includes not only vessels, but logistics management services, infrastructure, terminals facilities and U.S. citizen merchant mariners to crew the government owned/controlled and commercial fleets; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support the Jones Act and related maritime cabotage laws critical to America’s maritime infrastructure, and therefore, to the United States national defense.

Resolution No. 23: Support for the Department of Homeland Security and Coast Guard
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended and Consolidated with Resolution No. 66 (TX))

WHEREAS, The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil have made Americans painfully aware of their vulnerability to violence from international terrorism; and

WHEREAS, On September 20, 2001, President Bush announced the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security, a new cabinet position designed to be the single source of authority, at the highest levels, for all homeland defense programs and policies; and

WHEREAS, The Coast Guard was transferred from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Homeland Security; and

WHEREAS, The Coast Guard was able to respond to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, within hours, and its homeland security missions have since significantly increased; and

WHEREAS, Included in the numerous peacetime and wartime missions of the Coast Guard is law enforcement in its many facets to include drug interdiction; interception of illegal aliens; environment protection; maritime safety, including search and rescue responsibilities and inspecting and licensing Merchant Marine ships; and national security to include port security, and serving as an essential wartime and peacetime partner of the U.S. Navy; and

WHEREAS, To carry out these critical missions, it is essential that highly skilled and motivated men and women continue to be recruited and retained by the Coast Guard and its Reserve, and that cutters, aircraft, and required facilities be fully funded; and

WHEREAS, Without adequate resources, the United States Coast Guard will be unable to meet its national and international commitments to the detriment of the American people and other democratic nations; and

WHEREAS, The Coast Guard needs to modernize and recapitalize its integrated surface and air sensors and communication assets allowing the Coast Guard to efficiently and effectively support national maritime security interests well into the 21st century; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the Department of Homeland Security and urges the Administration and Congress to make security of the United States the top national priority; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to arm the Department of Homeland Security with the legal powers and fiduciary tools to harmonize the many agencies and offices with homeland security responsibilities into a viable and credible deterrent to those who seek to inflict violence on the United States and the American people; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to fund homeland security tasks and functions being performed at a regional, state, and local levels; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the Administration and Congress to fully fund the United States Coast Guard to achieve its numerous vital missions including homeland security, law enforcement, environmental protection,
maritime safety, and other missions as assigned as well as its modernization and recapitalization initiatives; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the annual Congressional passage of the Coast Guard Authorization Act; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress and the Department of Homeland Security to support pay and benefits equity for Coast Guard men and women as well as the same quality of life features as authorized for the other Armed Forces of the United States; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion National Security Commission and the Legislative Commission each establish a liaison with the U.S. Coast Guard in order to advocate for legislative approval of future Coast Guard budget requests.

Resolution No. 29: Commercial Shipbuilding for Defense
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)
WHEREAS, The United States emerged as the world’s foremost economic power and trading nation after the Cold War, and America’s policymakers have neglected to use these advantages to sustain the nation’s naval and maritime power; and
WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Maritime Administration the number of merchant vessels sailing internationally flying the U.S. Flag has been reduced from 1,072 to 191 over the last six decades; and
WHEREAS, In 1955, the U.S. Flag fleet represented almost 25% of the world’s overall tonnage while the U.S. share today is approaching a mere 2% of total world tonnage; and
WHEREAS, The 600-ship navy envisioned by President Ronald Reagan would have kept the ship yards busy; and
WHEREAS, U.S. Navy active ship levels have been reduced from 559 ships in 1975 to approximately 274 today, including 11 aircraft carriers, 22 cruisers, 60 destroyers, 26 frigates, 2 littoral combat ships, 9 amphibious assault ships, 2 amphibious command ships, 9 amphibious transport docks, 12 dock landing ships, 53 attack submarines, 14 ballistic missile submarines, 4 guided missile submarines, and 14 mine countermeasures ships; and
WHEREAS, The question of how the United States should respond to China’s naval modernization effort has emerged as a key issue in U.S. defense planning and this question is important to the U.S. Navy because many military programs for countering improved military forces would fall within the Navy’s budget; and
WHEREAS, A U.S.-Chinese military conflict is possible however unlikely, due to the significant economic linkages between the two countries and the tremendous damage that such a conflict could cause on both sides; and
WHEREAS, U.S. Navy programs for countering improved Chinese maritime military forces need to positively influence the political evolution of the Pacific region so that the United States can protect its national interests in the Pacific and around the world; and
WHEREAS, China’s naval modernization effort encompasses a broad range of weapon acquisition programs including anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), submarines, and surface ships along with improved maintenance, logistics, and training systems; and
WHEREAS, Potential issues for Congress include whether or not the U.S. Navy will be large enough to adequately counter improved Chinese naval capabilities and have the ability to counter Chinese ASBMs and submarines; and
WHEREAS, U.S. commercial build rates are not large enough to provide the strategic sealift needed in an emergency, or to support a shipbuilding industry large enough to meet future U.S. naval needs; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to stop further erosion of our vital maritime capability; and be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the President and Congress to boost naval budgets, promote commercial shipbuilding, expand the use of U.S. flagged ships in world commerce, and resist foreign actions that would further damage America’s defense industrial base.

Resolution No. 32: Support Domestic Energy Production
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)
WHEREAS, The United States’ continued reliance on foreign sources of energy places our national security and economic well-being as a nation at risk during times of crisis; and
WHEREAS, The United States continues to import approximately 60 percent or more of its crude oil; and
WHEREAS, The countries of Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela are bound by their membership in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); and
WHEREAS, The United States imports 40 percent of its oil from OPEC-member countries; and
WHEREAS, The war on terrorism and continuing conflict in the Middle East has brought into sharp focus the heavy reliance of the United States on foreign oil which necessitates a re-evaluation of our current and long-range energy policies; and
WHEREAS, Congress has denied petroleum exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Region and the Administration has denied the construction of the northern section of the Keystone Pipeline XL even though such efforts to expand our domestic supply could reduce our reliance on foreign sources of energy; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress and the Administration to pursue further development of domestic sources of energy to include: increasing U.S. petroleum production in an environmentally sensible manner so as to reduce America’s reliance on foreign petroleum; building new nuclear energy plants; implementing domestic crude oil; gas exploration; and oil shale development.

Resolution No. 108: Support for Legislation Prohibiting Hate Speech at Military Funerals
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)
WHEREAS, Since its creation, the United States has honored its war dead by a sacred tradition of military funerals, and continues to treat its war dead with sanctity, dignity and honor, and recognizes the ultimate sacrifice made to protect, defend, and preserve the freedoms and way of life in the United States; and
WHEREAS, Certain groups oppose various policies of the United States, particularly the armed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and protest those policies at the time and location of militaryfunerals of servicemembers who were killed in combat or who died from battle wounds; and
WHEREAS, Such protests have included chants against the President, the United States and its armed forces; laced with profanity, insults to the deceased servicemember,
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and his or her family, desecration of the Flag of the United States, and other sacred symbols of our country; and

WHEREAS, Such protests at military funerals have led to confrontations between protestors and family or community members including members of veterans organizations who vociferously oppose the positions advanced by the said protestors, and who support and honor the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and others serving in the armed forces; and

WHEREAS, These protests are targeted at the deceased servicemember and their families and can be considered hate speech; and

WHEREAS, These protests interfere with the bereaved family’s grieving process during the mourning period in connection with funerals administered by the United States Armed Forces and Congressionally chartered veterans organizations thereby violating Title 18 USC 13§ 245 Federally Protected Activities 1(b), which states, “Whoever attempts to interfere with any person participating in any service or activity provided or administered by the United States… shall be fined under this title, or imprisoned not more than one year, or both”; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a congressionally chartered organization pursuant to USC Chapter 217; and

WHEREAS, Under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, citizens have the right to free speech; and

WHEREAS, It is not an unreasonable or unconstitutional intrusion of the free speech rights of protestors to preclude them from intentionally targeting military funerals and dishonoring those servicemembers who have died in armed conflict and their families; and

WHEREAS, Justice Samuel Alito has stated, “… it is clear that the First Amendment does not entirely preclude liability for the intentional infliction of emotional distress by means of speech” and “in order to have a society in which public issues can be openly and vigorously debated, it is not necessary to allow the brutalization of innocent victims” in addition to “our profound commitment to free and open debate is not a license for…vicious verbal assault”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion finds the targeted protest of servicemember funerals to be a vile and despicable act and not worthy of American citizens who enjoy the freedoms purchased by the sacrifice and death of military heroes; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to designate protests planned and conducted at targeted servicemember funerals as hate speech prohibited by law; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress define the official mourning period for servicemembers killed in combat to be at least one week; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress prohibit the planning for, or conduct of, protests aimed at a specific member of the military or the related family within the one mile radius of activity pertaining to funeral services, procession, and internment for a period of one day before and one day after the official mourning period.

Referred Resolution

Resolution No. 197 (OH): Policy on Concealed Carry Permits

Rejected Resolution

Resolution No. 277 (NM): Commission the USS Los Alamos
Resolution No. 85: Support for Military Quality of Life Standards
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for members of the Armed Forces, their dependents, military retirees, and survivors as people are the foundation of our Nation's fighting forces; and

WHEREAS, Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace; and

WHEREAS, Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether good service members and their families remain in military service: Other major factors include fair treatment, career stability, regular promotions, adequate quarters, adequate health care, commissaries, and day care facilities, all of which ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of service members; and

WHEREAS, Our military retirees and their dependents and survivors are deserving and rightfully entitled to adequate health care treatment, concurrent receipt, and regular cost-of-living adjustments to military retirement pay and survivor benefit plans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense to support and fund quality of life features including, but not limited to, the following: military pay comparability for the Armed Forces and regular increases in the Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH); renovation and construction of military quarters and increased funding for child day care centers and pay raises must be competitive with the private sector; adequate medical, mental, and dental health services; morale, welfare, and recreational facilities; non-privatized exchanges and commissary facilities, and the Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) and its functions should be retained and not relegated to the military services; preserving an attractive retirement system for the active and reserve components; oppose any changes to the military retirement system, whether prospective or retroactive, that would violate contracts made with military retirees and that would undermine morale and readiness; requiring the Services perform mandatory physical examinations, without waivers, for all separating and retiring service members within 90 days of separation from service; full funding concurrent receipt of military retirement pay, and VA disability compensation as well as Special Compensation pays for disabled military retirees; that the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset be eliminated; TRICARE for Life and the TRICARE Senior Pharmacy program for Medicare-eligible military retirees, their dependents and military survivors, should be adequately funded; regular cost-of-living adjustments to military retirement and increased death gratuity payments; combat zone tax exclusions for service in South Korea; that Congress extend and improve additional quality of life benefits, allowances and privileges to the National Guard and Reserves involved in homeland security and other missions so as to more closely approximate those of the active force; military retirement pay and TRICARE health care for members of the Reserve Components should be authorized before age 60; tax credits to private businesses that pay the difference between military and civilian salaries to mobilized reserve component service members; restore travel exemptions for Reserve and Guard members for expenses associated with attending drills; military health care should also be provided to members of the Reserve
Components and their dependents, who become injured while on active duty status regardless of the number of days served on active duty, to the same degree as active duty members under the same circumstances; and whenever a Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) is conducted, certain base facilities such as base medical facilities, commissaries, exchanges and other facilities be preserved for use by active duty, reserve forces personnel, military retired veterans and their families.

Resolution No. 92: Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission Positions

Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) was established by the National Defense Authorization Act FY 2013 Pub. L. 112-239, 126 Stat. 1787 (2013) to conduct a review of military compensation and retirement systems and to make recommendations to modernize such systems in order to:

1. Ensure the long-term viability of the All-Volunteer Force by sustaining the required human resources of that force during all levels of conflict and economic conditions
2. Enable the quality of life for members of the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services and their families in a manner that fosters successful recruitment, retention, and careers for members of the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services
3. Modernize and achieve fiscal sustainability for the compensation and retirement systems for the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services for the 21st century; and

WHEREAS, MCRMC released 15 recommendations to modernize the Uniformed Services’ compensation and benefit programs today, 29 January 2015; and

WHEREAS, MCRMC’s 15 recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Help more Servicemembers save for retirement earlier in their careers, leverage the retention power of traditional Uniformed Services retirement, and give the Services greater flexibility to retain quality people in demanding career fields by implementing a modernized retirement system;

Recommendation 2: Provide more options for Servicemembers to protect their pay for their survivors by offering new Survivor Benefit Plan coverage without Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset; Recommendation 3: Promote servicemembers’ financial literacy by implementing a more robust financial and health benefit training program;

Recommendation 4: Increase efficiency within the Reserve Component by consolidating 30 Reserve Component duty statuses into 6 broader statuses;

Recommendation 5: Ensure Servicemembers receive the best possible combat casualty care by creating a joint readiness command, new standards for essential medical capabilities, and innovative tools to attract readiness-related medical cases to military hospitals;

Recommendation 6: Increase access, choice, and value of health care for active-duty family members, Reserve Component members, and retirees by allowing beneficiaries to choose from a selection of commercial insurance plans offered through a Department of Defense health benefit program;

Recommendation 7: Improve support for servicemembers’ dependents with special needs by aligning services offered under the Extended Care Health Option to those of state Medicaid waiver programs;

Recommendation 8: Improve collaboration between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs by enforcing coordination on electronic medical records, a uniform formulary for transitioning Servicemembers, common services, and reimbursements;

Recommendation 9: Protect both access to and savings at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges by consolidating these activities into a single defense resale organization.
Recommendation 10: Improve access to child care on military installations by ensuring the Department of Defense has the information and budgeting tools to provide child care within 90 days of need;

Recommendation 11: Safeguard education benefits for Servicemembers by reducing redundancy and ensuring the fiscal sustainability of education programs;

Recommendation 12: Better prepare Servicemembers for transition to civilian life by expanding education and granting states more flexibility to administer the Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program;

Recommendation 13: Ensure servicemembers receive financial assistance to cover nutritional needs by providing them cost-effective supplemental benefits;

Recommendation 14: Expand Space-Available travel to more dependents of servicemembers by allowing travel by dependents of servicemembers deployed for 30 days or more;

Recommendation 15: Measure how the challenges of military life affect children’s school work by implementing a national military dependent student identifier; and

WHEREAS, On March 25, 2015, The American Legion gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives and stated that The American Legion supports recommendations nos. 3, 8, 12, 14 and 15; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion testimony stated as well, that it does not support recommendation numbers. 1, 2, 6, and 11; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion testimony also stated that it maintains no position in connection to recommendation numbers 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 13; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion testimony also stated that it maintains no position in connection to recommendation numbers, i.e. recommendation numbers 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 13; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 4, current Title 10 Reserve Component (RC) statutory authorities and duty statuses are as follows: full mobilization, partial mobilization, Presidential reserve call-up, Major disaster/emergency response, preplanned combatant command, captive status, unsatisfactory participation (45 days), unsatisfactory participation (24 months), disciplinary action, annual active duty (up to 30 days), additional training and operational support, medical evaluation and treatment, medical care (duty less than 30 days), retiree recall, muster duty, duty at the national guard bureau, aid for state governments, enforce federal authority, National Guard called to federal service, additional training periods, additional flight training periods, readiness management periods, funeral honors duty; Title 32 – National Guard required training and other duty, additional training periods, additional flight training periods, readiness management periods and funeral honors duty; Title 14 – U.S. Coast Guard emergency augmentation; and

WHEREAS, According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, the numerous criteria for determining Reserve Component statuses can make it difficult for military commanders to call RC members to duty because the current system is complex, aligns poorly to current training and complicates rather than supports effective budgeting; and

WHEREAS, The MCRMC recommends streamlining RC duty status to the following six categories: Title 10 Active Duty, Inactive Reserve Service, Federal Service (Presidential Call-Up), Title 32 Full-Time National Guard, Inactive National Guard, Title 14 Active Duty for emergency augmentation; and

WHEREAS, In reference to recommendation 5, the MCRMC is calling for the creation of a four star Joint Readiness Command to manage the readiness, as well as the interoperability, efficiency, and “jointness” of the entire military force, including medical readiness; and
WHEREAS, According to the MCRMC, this recommendation is made for fear of losing the lifesaving capabilities developed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom by joint military medical personnel; and

WHEREAS, The ingenuity, adroitness and first-hand experience of U.S. medical personnel are the reasons for the development of these effective capabilities; and

WHEREAS, Each branch of the military can benefit from experience-based training and not necessarily by the creation of redundant bureaucracy or added layer to the Military Health System’s command structure or the Defense Health Agency (DHA); and

WHEREAS, The Military Health System (MHS) is a global, comprehensive, integrated system that includes combat medical services, health readiness futures, a health care delivery system, public health activities, medical education and training, and medical research and development. The fundamental mission of the MHS, providing medical support to military operations; and

WHEREAS, According to the Department of Defense, DHA is a joint, integrated Combat Support Agency that enables the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services to provide a medically ready force and ready medical force to Combatant Commands in both peacetime and wartime; and

WHEREAS, In reference to recommendation 7, Exceptional Family Members (EMF) are servicemembers who have family members with special medical or educational needs and EMFs can register for TRICARE Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) program; and

WHEREAS, Children may remain eligible for ECHO benefits beyond the usual TRICARE eligibility age limit (age 21 or age 23 if enrolled in a full-time course of study at an approved institution of higher learning and if the sponsor provides over 50 percent of the financial support) provided all of the following are true: the sponsor remains on active duty; the child is incapable of self-support because of a mental or physical incapacity that occurs prior to the loss of eligibility; and the sponsor is responsible for over 50 percent of the child’s financial support; and

WHEREAS, Lack of proper funding for maintaining DoD quality of life programs including ECHO, risks a deteriorating effect on military healthcare options specifically established to provide supplemental service and benefits to active duty family members with qualifying mental or physical disabilities; and

WHEREAS, In reference to recommendations 9, any effort to reduce or dismantle the integrity of the military commissary system would be seen as a serious breach of faith with a benefit system that currently serves as a mainstay for the active and reserve components, military retirees and military survivors, and 100 percent service-connected disabled veterans, among other qualifying personnel; and

WHEREAS, In reference to recommendation 10, Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether a good servicemember and their families remain in military service and adequate access to child care is crucial to supporting valuable assistance that can ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, In reference to recommendation 13, MCRMC recognizes that some servicemembers will continue to need financial help to purchase food for their families and the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (SNAP), better known as food stamps, is available to servicemembers in the United States, however, the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA), the military’s alternative to SNAP, is currently a second option, but only serves approximately 300 servicemembers a year; and

WHEREAS, Considering the low number of participants, it appears that the majority of military families in-need are not familiar with FSSA due to the lack of promotion of the FSSA website by Department of Defense; and

WHEREAS, MCRMC recommends that FSSA should be retained for servicemembers in overseas locations where SNAP is unavailable, but should be sunset over a two-year period in the U.S.; and
WHEREAS, Military families in-need should be allowed more than one option when applying for assistance; and
WHEREAS, Lack of proper funding for maintaining DoD quality of life programs including FSSA, risks a deteriorating effect on overall morale; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the following Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) recommendations: Recommendation 3: Promote Servicemembers’ financial literacy by implementing a more robust financial and health benefit training program; Recommendation 4: Increase efficiency within the Reserve Component by consolidating 30 Reserve Component duty statuses into 6 broader statuses; Recommendation 8: Improve collaboration between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs by enforcing coordination on electronic medical records, a uniform formulary for transitioning servicemembers, common services, and reimbursements; Recommendation 10: Improve access to child care on military installations by ensuring the Department of Defense has the information and budgeting tools to provide child care within 90 days of need; Recommendation 12: Better prepare servicemembers for transition to civilian life by expanding education and granting states more flexibility to administer the Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program; Recommendation 14: Expand Space-Available travel to more dependents of Servicemembers by allowing travel by dependents of servicemembers deployed for 30 days or more; and Recommendation 15: Measure how the challenges of military life affect children's school work by implementing a national military dependent student identifier; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion does not support MCRMC Recommendation 1: Help more servicemembers save for retirement earlier in their careers, leverage the retention power of traditional Uniformed Services retirement, and give the Services greater flexibility to retain quality people in demanding career fields by implementing a modernized retirement system; Recommendation 2: Provide more options for servicemembers to protect their pay for their survivors by offering new Survivor Benefit Plan coverage without Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset; Recommendation 5: Ensure servicemembers receive the best possible combat casualty care by creating a joint readiness command, new standards for essential medical capabilities, and innovative tools to attract readiness-related medical cases to military hospitals; Recommendation 6: Increase access, choice, and value of health care for active-duty family members, Reserve Component members, and retirees by allowing beneficiaries to choose from a selection of commercial insurance plans offered through a Department of Defense health benefit program; Recommendation 7: Improve support for Servicemembers’ dependents with special needs by aligning services offered under the Extended Care Health Option to those of state Medicaid waiver programs; Recommendation 9: Protect both access to and savings at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges by consolidating these activities into a single defense resale organization; Recommendation 11: Safeguard education benefits for Servicemembers by reducing redundancy and ensuring the fiscal sustainability of education programs; and Recommendation 13: Ensure Servicemembers receive financial assistance to cover nutritional needs by providing them cost-effective supplemental benefits.
Resolution No. 93: Codify Burial Eligibility for Arlington National Cemetery
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Arlington National Cemetery is our nation’s most sacred shrine representing an embodiment of the sacrifices that were made to uphold our country’s ideals and freedoms; and
WHEREAS, More than 400,000 veterans and their dependents are buried here on 612 acres of land; and
WHEREAS, Arlington is one of more than 100 national cemeteries but, unlike the others, Arlington Cemetery is administered by the Department of the Army; and
WHEREAS, In spite of restrictive regulations (Title 32, CFR), there have been numerous waivers in past years, falsification of military records to gain interment at Arlington and even an unprecedented presidential requested waiver and reservation; and
WHEREAS, Eligibility criteria for burials at Arlington need to be codified in order to assure compliance and fairness and to assure that the remaining space at Arlington is judiciously used; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to codify eligibility criteria for burial at Arlington National Cemetery and that such burial be restricted to service members who die on active-duty; to our most decorated veterans to include recipients of the Purple Heart; former members of the armed forces separated from the military with a physical disability of 30 percent or more before October 1, 1949; and to veterans who spent full careers in uniform, and to their spouses and eligible children; to former prisoners of war; and for the President or former Presidents as Commanders in Chief of the Armed Forces; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion believes there should be no waivers for unqualified persons except under unique and compelling circumstances that comport with codified non-partisan waiver procedures as established by Congress; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion believes eligibility for interment of cremated remains of honorably discharged veterans in the Columbarium at Arlington should also be codified.

Resolution No. 94: Earned Military Benefits
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace; and
WHEREAS, The profession of arms cannot be compared to any civilian occupations because of the required amount of sacrifice or necessary individual dedication; and
WHEREAS, An all-volunteer military requires benefits commensurate with sacrifices made by military personnel to entice enlistment and re-enlistments; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DoD) has on several occasions conducted studies to change, modify, and update military retirement, healthcare, or other earned benefits yet recommendations from those studies have been repeatedly found to be unsatisfactory; and
WHEREAS, Regardless of identified negative impacts to servicemembers and retirees, DoD continues to attempt to conduct a “bait and switch”; changing benefits for military service with no recourse for currently serving individuals; and
WHEREAS, A change in earned retirement benefits, known as REDUX, was instituted in 1986 but was changed in 2000 because of negative impact on recruiting and retention; and

WHEREAS, Any changes to the existing military benefit system would violate contracts made with military retirees and currently serving military personnel and would undermine morale and readiness; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion encourage Congress to ensure that any benefit in force at the time of initial enlistment cannot be reduced in value, and that benefit is to remain in force throughout the entire military career and retirement of a servicemember.

Resolution No. 95: Flexible Savings Accounts
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Medical savings accounts, also known as “flexible savings accounts,” are recognized by Title 37 of the United States Code for civilian employees and active duty members of the Department of Defense; and

WHEREAS, Medical savings accounts are pretax dollar savings utilized by families specifically for health care, dental care, and child care expenses; and

WHEREAS, Reserve Component members not under TRICARE historically have had significant mobilization issues due to deferred preventive health care due to cost for such things as dental checkups, which reduced the mobilization readiness of both service members and their units; and

WHEREAS, Medical savings accounts would allow Reserve Component members to afford regular health care, thus improve their mobilization health readiness, and thereby also improve the readiness of the Reserve Components; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion supports benefits that support Reserve Component members, their military families and the nation; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes the Department of Defense, by not allowing medical savings accounts for the Reserve Components equal to the active duty components, is discriminating against those members of the Armed Services Reserve Component who, although they serve equally in the defense of this nation, are not allowed access to a medical savings account; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion supports the participation in pretax medical savings accounts for both active duty and Reserve Component servicemembers and military families; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress be urged to pass legislation that enables participation in pretax medical savings accounts.

Resolution No. 97: Grant Access to all U. S. Military Facilities to Military Retirees and their Dependents
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, A portion of the earned benefits of military retirees is considered to be the use of military facilities, such as post and base exchanges, commissaries, health care, recreational facilities, mail, and other U.S. military facilities worldwide; and

WHEREAS, As a direct result of the Status of Forces Agreements between the U.S. government and host countries many of these benefits are usually denied to retired military members and their dependents residing or visiting U.S. military facilities located outside the U.S.; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That all future Status of Forces Agreements negotiated, renegotiated, or revised with host countries allow for the unimpeded use of all U.S. military facilities by retired U.S. military members and their dependents.

Resolution No. 100: Military Commissaries
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Defense officials have asked the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) for cost-saving options including how the system would operate with reduced or no taxpayer subsidies; and
WHEREAS, The Department of Defense is implementing pilot programs to reduce costs such as variable pricing; and
WHEREAS, DeCA currently operates nearly 250 stores worldwide and employs approximately 18,000 people and its annual sales exceed $5 billion; and
WHEREAS, By using commissaries, financially challenged military families can save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared with commercial supermarkets; and
WHEREAS, In addition to improving the quality of life for the troops and their families, commissary privileges help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve our country; and
WHEREAS, Without commissary savings, pay compensation for active duty and military retirees would be less competitive with the civilian sector; and
WHEREAS, Retired as well as drilling Reservists and National Guardsmen are now authorized to use the commissaries and their access to the DeCA should not be restricted; and
WHEREAS, Any effort to reduce or dismantle the integrity of the military commissary system would be seen as a serious breach of faith with a benefit system that currently serves as a mainstay for the active and reserve components, military retirees and military survivors, military personnel involuntarily discharged or released from active duty, and 100 percent service-connected disabled veterans and others; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge the Department of Defense and Congress to continue full funding of the military commissary system and to retain this vital non-pay compensation benefit system which is essential to the morale and readiness of the dedicated men and women who have served, and continue to serve, the national security interests of the United States; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion oppose any efforts to institute “variable pricing” or to privatize the military commissary system or to reduce discounts or to dismantle or downsize the Defense Commissary Agency.

Resolution No. 101: Support for the Reformation of the Military Voting System
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The 1986 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (Public Law 99-410) streamlined the procedures for overseas absentee voting; authorized a back-up write-in overseas ballot if the voter did not receive one requested from the state; Postal Service was to ensure that balloting materials were “carried expeditiously and free
of postage;” and the overall intent was to ensure “maximum access to the polls” by both uniformed and civilian overseas voters; and
WHEREAS, The 2000 general election demonstrated numerous problems concerning uniformed and overseas citizens absentee balloting procedures exist not only in Florida, but nationally as well; and
WHEREAS, Although a presidential election is held on the same date across the United States, it is composed of 50 separate state elections; and the Constitution of the United States grants the responsibility for the conduct of elections to the states; and
WHEREAS, Many states have difficulty printing and mailing ballots to overseas military voters in a timely manner, thus, posing a challenge for military members and their family members to vote and return ballots within deadlines; and other states will not accept ballots received 30 days before general elections making it difficult, particularly, for military personnel deployed overseas; and
WHEREAS, Absentee ballots from forward deployed military members entitled to free postage in locales like the Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia often are not postmarked at mailing but are postmarked enroute resulting in late postmarking in the continental United States; and
WHEREAS, Military voters should be protected from disenfranchisement based on technicalities that are beyond their control such as postmark discrepancies, missing notarized signatures, and confusion on residency requirements; and
WHEREAS, Some military units compound military absentee voting problems because voting assistance in the military is often an additional duty relegated to the most junior officers and special vigilance is often not given to handling election mail; and
WHEREAS, A worldwide Internet voting pilot program was recently tested by a Department of Defense contractor using digital signatures and ballot encryption, however, it was rejected for security reasons; and
WHEREAS, Many states now allow the fax transmission of absentee voting materials; and
WHEREAS, Despite progress made after more than a decade by the Department of Defense cooperatively working with the states, on average, some 30 percent of all military absentee ballots are still not counted in federal elections; and
WHEREAS, National defense is uniquely a constitutional mandate that gives the federal government the authority and responsibility to ensure military personnel and their families are not disenfranchised by the circumstances of their service and, thereby, necessitating federal legislation as the states have not resolved the problem for nearly a century, and a more adequate uniform and consistent system, not 50 unique systems, is needed; and
WHEREAS, The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), administers the federal responsibilities of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986, as amended in 2010 by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE); and
WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes the progress made by FVAP and the usefulness of its website www.FVAP.gov; and
WHEREAS, The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws promotes drafts of uniform and model acts, and it could offer uniform formats for the states to follow on military absentee voting; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion ensure that satisfactorily drafted uniform acts and/or regulations pertaining to the Military Voting Absentee System, are made available to all appropriate state and local election entities; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges that appropriate laws and guidelines be developed at federal, state, and local levels with the intent that all
military absentee voters and their families will have their votes counted in every election; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the sending and receiving of blank and completed military absentee ballots be accomplished electronically as much as possible; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion takes an advocate role on this vital issue at national, state and local levels.

Resolution No. 102: Oppose Tricare Fee Increases

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes the debt owed to the entire military retirement community for their sacrifices and hardships endured in honorable military service to this nation; and

WHEREAS, Administration and defense leaders are seeking to impose very large health care fee increases on military retirees and their families; and

WHEREAS, The proposed fee increases are inappropriate and out of line with career service members’ unique sacrifices; and

WHEREAS, Military medical and retirement benefits must be markedly better than civilian benefits because they are primary offsets for decades of extraordinarily arduous service conditions; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees’ careers entailed unique and arduous service conditions few other Americans are willing to endure for 20 or 30 years including hazardous duty, service in foreign countries, often in hostile environments, extended family separations, just to mention a few; and

WHEREAS, The current fiscal realities dictate certain financial concessions may have to be made by our citizens but to unfairly burden America’s military retiree families any further is unconscionable; and

WHEREAS, Those who point to the disparity in cost between civilian and military health insurance, and hint at unfairness, simply do not appreciate the huge premiums already paid by the selfless service and sacrifice of our service members and their families; and

WHEREAS, TRICARE enrollment fees are scheduled to increase annual on October 1st; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion sees this proposal as an erosion of quality of life earned benefits from a grateful nation for honorable military service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion is strongly opposed to proposed hikes in premiums and or enrollment fees being paid by enrollees in the military’s health insurance program known as TRICARE; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges Congress to decisively reject these unjust proposed increases in the military retirees’ TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles, or premiums.

Resolution No. 103: Correction of Military Records

Origin: Maryland

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 provided for the recognition of representatives of The American Legion, and other organizations, to serve as counsel before the discharge and retirement boards of the Armed Forces, and this recognition was extended to cover the Boards for Correction of Military Records (BCMRs) when they were created under the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion was actively involved in the legislative process that established the Correction Boards under section 1552 of title 10, United States Code (USC); and

WHEREAS, Although under provision of title 10, USC, 1552, a three year statute of limitations was created which begins as of the date of discovery of an error or injustice on the military records of a former service member, the boards are also authorized, under statute, to excuse filings beyond the three year period if it is in the interest of justice to do so; and

WHEREAS, For many years, the boards routinely waived the three year statute of limitation so as to provide veterans the opportunity to correct any error or injustice in their records; and

WHEREAS, In the past, the BCMRs have considered that the effective date of commencement of the three year limit was effective the date of the final separation from service; and

WHEREAS, Congress is investigating the fairness and independence of the BCMRs and the effective date for the commencement of the correction of records by active service members; and

WHEREAS, Section 205 of The Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Civil Relief Act of 1940 provides for the waiver of periods of limitation for persons in military service with respect to civil proceedings; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruling in the case of Detweiler v. Pena, held that the three year rule does not apply to active duty personnel; and

WHEREAS, The Discharge Review Board, considered to be a lower review agency, has a 15 year statute of limitation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That appropriate action be taken in support of legislation to amend title 10, United States Code, section 1552, so as to eliminate all time limitations restricting when a claimant may petition the Boards for Correction of Military Records for relief of an error or injustice.

Resolution No. 105: Reference Veterans Service Organizations at Discharge
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Members of The American Legion are veterans of the United States Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, Legionnaires would like to share the veterans services available to newly discharged and retired service members; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recommends that a separation package be supplied to each of these newly discharged and retired veterans and recommends that separation packets contain the names and addresses of all major veterans service organization in the United States by state; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes that the transition from military life to civilian life is sometimes difficult and recognizes that association with fellow veterans and access to available services is highly beneficial in their efforts to become productive citizens; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion respectfully requests each military service include such a package of information in the separation process from the military; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to insert a clause into the briefing of transitioning servicemen and women that makes specific reference to veterans service organizations, such as The American Legion, in their civilian communities.
Resolution No. 107: Support Armed Services Retirement Homes
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH), formally known as United States Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home (USSAH) and the United States Naval Home (USNH), is a pair of continuing care facilities which was created more than 150 years ago to offer retirement homes for distinguished veterans who had served as soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in our nation’s conflicts; and

WHEREAS, Persons are eligible to become residents of AFRH who served as members of the Armed Forces, at least one-half of whose service was not active commissioned service (other than as a warrant officer or limited-duty officer), are eligible to become residents of the Retirement Home: are 60 years of age or over; and were discharged or released from service in the Armed Forces under honorable conditions after 20 or more years of active service; persons who are determined under rules prescribed by the chief operating officer to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of a service-connected disability incurred in the line of duty in the Armed Forces; served in a war theater during a time of war declared by Congress or were eligible for hostile fire special pay were discharged or released from service in the Armed Forces under honorable conditions; and are determined under rules prescribed by the chief operating officer to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of injuries, disease, or disability; served in a women's component of the Armed Forces before June 12, 1948; and are determined under rules prescribed by the chief operating officer to be eligible for admission because of compelling personal circumstances; and

WHEREAS, A person who has been convicted of a felony or is not free of drug, alcohol, or psychiatric problems shall be ineligible to become a resident of the Retirement Home; and

WHEREAS, Pursuant to 24 U.S. Code and 37 U.S. Code, monthly pay deductions of $1.00 from every enlisted member, warrant officer, and limited-duty officer provide a substantial stream of revenue, among other sources of support, fund the AFRH; and

WHEREAS, The extensive downsizing of the Armed Forces due to the Budget Control Act of 2011 and associated sequestration is subsequently resulting in the reduction in the number of military personnel; and

WHEREAS, The current and upcoming reductions in end-strength evidently will reduce revenue and, coupled with rising nursing home care costs are a cause for concern which would potentially require both locations of the AFRH (Gulfport, Mississippi and Washington, D.C.) to close their doors; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to continue support and fund those measures, to include annual appropriations, which will provide for the long-term solvency and viability of the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Resolution No. 109: Support for Pain Management Research, Treatments and Therapies at DoD, VA and NIH
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The characteristics of modern warfare, including the global war on terrorism, exposes members of the uniformed services to many adverse and dangerous environmental diseases and living conditions; and

WHEREAS, War zone conditions, replete with noxious gases released from explosive devices among other potentially harmful environmental exposures in such theaters as the Middle East and Southwest Asia, as well as in other areas of the world in which service members are exposed to combat-like conditions, produce traumatic, life altering, battlefield
scars, and casualties unheard of in previous wars including infections, instant crushing of protective skull and body bones, loss of sight and limbs, dehydration, blood and other body infections and, in some cases, severely impairment or total loss of mental and physical body motor functions; and

WHEREAS, Military medical rapid response teams provide superb, state of the art, medical and psychological life-saving treatment and care at battlefield sites with an extraordinarily high success rate; and

WHEREAS, Military, Department of Veterans Affairs, and some specialty civilian health care treatment facilities are overburdened with caring for the most serious and most painful battlefield casualties ever witnessed from war; and

WHEREAS, The nation’s medical and mental health care professionals have not been provided with sufficient resources to adequately research, diagnose, treat, and manage acute and chronic pain associated with present day battlefield casualties; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That federal funding for pain management research, treatment, and therapies at the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and at the National Institutes of Health be significantly increased and that Congress and the Administration re-double their efforts to ensure that an effective pain management program be uniformly established and implemented; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs increase their investments in pain management clinical research by improving and accelerating clinical trials at military and VA treatment facilities and affiliated university medical centers and research programs.

Resolution No. 110: Support for Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion has supported the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU), since its establishment in 1972 as the nation’s federal academic health center dedicated to providing uniquely educated and trained uniformed officers for the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, and Public Health Service; and

WHEREAS, The university’s nationally ranked military and civilian faculty conduct cutting edge research in the biomedical sciences and in areas specific to the Department of Defense (DOD) health care mission such as combat casualty care, infectious diseases, and radiation biology; and

WHEREAS, The university specializes in military and public health medicine, focusing on keeping people healthy, disease prevention, and diagnosis and treatment, and USU faculty offer significant expertise in tropical medicine and hygiene, parasitology, epidemiologic methods, and preventive medicine; and

WHEREAS, The DOD and Congress have recognized the extensive military-unique and preventive health care education provided in the multi-service environment of USU ensures medical readiness and force health protection for the Military Health System (MHS); and

WHEREAS, USU is recognized as the place where students receive thorough preparation to deal with the medical aspects of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, radiological and biological, nuclear, and high yield explosive terrorism or other catastrophes; and

WHEREAS, USU has developed similar training for civilian first responders, medical professionals and emergency planners; and

WHEREAS, USU is also uniquely qualified and experienced in simulation technology, education and training; and
WHEREAS, USU, recognized by DOD as the Academic Health Center for the MHS, has graduated thousands of uniformed physician officers who represent approximately one-quarter of the total physicians on active duty in the Armed Forces; USU alumni have been described as the backbone of the MHS, and in addition, the USU Graduate School of Nursing has conferred Masters of Science in Nursing degrees to uniformed, critically required advanced practice nurses during the current nationwide nursing shortage; and, the university has conferred master and doctoral degrees through its Graduate Education Programs in essential areas requested by the MHS; and

WHEREAS, The establishment of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center expands the role of USU; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to: continue its demonstrated commitment to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU), as a national asset, for the continued provision of uniquely educated and trained uniformed physicians, advanced practice nurses, and scientists dedicated to careers of service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the United States Public Health Service; support timely construction and maintenance of the USU campus; continue funding the university’s collaborative effort for sharing its chemical, radiological and biological, nuclear, and high yield explosive (CBRNE) expertise and training; support development of the USU Immersive, Wide Area Virtual Environment (WAVE) Simulation for CBRNE/WMD Medical Readiness Training; support funding for the Graduate School of Nursing Teaching/Educational Programs and, encourage continued close collaboration between Walter Reed National Military Medical Center with USU as the core academic health center.

Resolution No. 176: Authorize and Fund TRICARE for Reserve Components and Dependents
Origin: Iowa
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense (DOD) created TRICARE to augment its Military Health System; and

WHEREAS, TRICARE largely consists of regional federally-contracted, for-profit health-care providers; and

WHEREAS, DOD’s utilization of Reserve Components in the performance of traditionally active duty missions continues globally; and

WHEREAS, Many members of the Reserve Components, when activated to perform fulltime duties, can no longer afford their civilian health-care coverage for themselves and their dependents and numerous activated Reservists have been non-deployable due to health or dental problems; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to authorize and fund the Department of Defense in providing permanent TRICARE health-care access for members of the Reserve Components and their dependents.

Resolution No. 200: Extended Care Health Option (ECHO)
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, One of the Four Pillars of The American Legion is National Security; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for our military and their families; and
WHEREAS, Part of National Security is maintaining a strong military; and
WHEREAS, The morale of the military has a direct effect on strength of the military; and
WHEREAS, Some military members have special health needs for their families such as autism, intellectual disability, serious physical disabilities and all extraordinary physical or psychological conditions; and
WHEREAS, Children may remain eligible for Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) benefits beyond the usual TRICARE eligibility age limit age 21 or age 23 provided the sponsor remains on active duty, the child is incapable of self-support, the sponsor is responsible for over 50 percent of the child’s financial support; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD) to support legislation to properly fund the quality of life features including the funding of the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) which provides supplemental service to active duty family members with qualifying mental or physical disabilities; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That the DOD inform active duty members of this benefit.

Resolution No. 203: Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, One of the Four Pillars of The American Legion is National Security; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for our military and their families; and
WHEREAS, Part of National Security is maintaining a strong military; and
WHEREAS, The morale of the military has a direct effect on strength of the military; and
WHEREAS, Some military families rely on food stamps and other programs to survive; and
WHEREAS, The majority of military families are not familiar with the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA Program); and
WHEREAS, Families must apply for these benefits and the DOD website dealing with FSSA had only 11,214 visitors which indicates not many families know of the program; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress and the Department of Defense to support legislation to properly fund the quality of life features including the funding of the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance.

Resolution No. 209: Space-A Travel for Unemployed and Disabled Veterans and Dependents
Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, The United States Department of Defense (DoD) in DoD Regulation 4515.13R has established a program of travel known as Space Available Travel to allow authorized passengers to occupy DoD aircraft seats that are surplus after all required passengers have been accommodated; and
WHEREAS, The purpose of this privilege was to provide uniformed servicemembers with a respite from the rigors of military service, and to provide retired uniformed service members with recognition for a career of rigorous duty; and
WHEREAS, The privilege is also extended to other categories of passengers, to include dependents, in support of the mission of the Uniformed Service members; and

WHEREAS, DoD regulation 4515.13-R does not provide for 100% disabled veterans, or 100% Individually Unemployed (IU) veterans, or dependents of 100% disabled veterans, or dependents of 100% IU veterans, to be eligible for Space Available Travel; and

WHEREAS, One hundred percent disabled veterans and 100% IU veterans may not have fulfilled the requirements for retirement, but have shown dedication to the DoD and a desire to retire by serving ten or more years of active duty service and separated due to their great sacrifice in the line of duty that resulted in a 100% disability rating or 100% IU; and

WHEREAS, Dependents of 100% disabled veterans and 100% IU veterans continue to faithfully support their disabled spouses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to authorize the Department of Defense to offer space available worldwide travel on military aircraft to 100% disabled veterans and 100% individually unemployed veterans who served ten or more years on active duty, and their dependents, be authorized to participate in Space Available Travel.

Resolution No. 224: Support for Concurrent Receipt of Military Retirement Pay and VA Disability Compensation

Origin: North Carolina
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, We reaffirm our support of veterans who have served our country as career military men and women; and

WHEREAS, These retired veterans were injured or disabled as a result of their service; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees have devoted more than 20 years to defending our country and democracy; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees are the only federal retirees who pay out of their own pocket for their service connected disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees with 50% or greater service connected disabilities are able to receive both military retired pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, All other federal retirees receive both retirement pay and disability compensation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion strongly support ending the unfair policy of forcing many military longevity retirees to forfeit some of their retired pay in order to receive equal amounts of disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for those retirees with less than 50% service connected disability.

National Guard and Reserve Forces
William Goede, Minnesota, Chairman

Approved

Resolution No. 15: Support Veteran Status for National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers

Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, For the purposes of this resolution, the term Reserve Component represents the National Guard, Air National Guard, and the Reserves of all U.S. Military and Naval Branches; and

WHEREAS, Any provision within the United States Code pertaining to both the Active and Reserve Components should also be true for the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve in terms of receiving legal and technical veterans’ status; and

WHEREAS, According to United State Code (USC) Title 38 - Veterans’ Benefits, the term “veteran” is defined as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable”; and

WHEREAS, Also according to USC Title 38, “drills” and “active duty for training” do not qualify as “active duty” thereby excluding approximately 280,000 former Reserve Component retirees among other service members who have served in the Reserve Component from the honor of having the technical and legal status of the title: Veteran; and

WHEREAS, As USC Title 38 currently stands, any Reserve-Component service member who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable but never called to federal duty for other than drills or active duty for training is indeed entitled to benefits such as retirement pay, TRICARE, VA service-connection eligibility among other benefits but is still not however legally or technically considered a Veteran according to the letter of the law; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes the military service of all those who serve in the Guard and Reserve who have supported and continue to support the deployments of the active duty component ensuring active units are fully prepared at all times; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion states that anyone who has in good faith taken the United States Armed Forces Oath of Enlistment or United States Uniformed Services Oath of Office for either full-time active military or naval duty, or for the National Guard, Air National Guard, Reserve Component, Coast Guard or Coast Guard Reserve and has honorably carried out the military obligations set forth within these oaths should be entitled to receiving the practical, technical and legal status of the title: Veteran; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that amends any provision in the United States Code that excludes drills or active-duty-for-training from the legal definition of active duty to a provision that includes drills or active-duty-for-training in the definition of active duty under the law.

Resolution No. 17: Position on the Operational Reserve
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, Historically, America has in times of relative peace looked for an immediate economic “peace dividend”; and

WHEREAS, This fervent call for cost savings has repeatedly placed the national security of the nation at risk; and

WHEREAS, The nation is currently undergoing severe economic times; and

WHEREAS, Once again the Department of Defense (DOD), in order to meet budget constraints has been required to reduce active duty end strength; and

WHEREAS, A reduction in active duty end strength will require a continued and even increased dependence on the reserve components in the form of an “Operational Reserve” to meet mission requirements; and
WHEREAS, The Fiscal Year 2017 budget anticipates the DOD will use the Guard and Reserve as a vital part of the operational force, and where it makes sense as a force of first choice; and
WHEREAS, An operational reserve requires increased commitment by servicemembers and their families; and
WHEREAS, An operational reserve requires sufficiently increased, timely, and dedicated funding for training, equipment, and family support issues; and
WHEREAS, In order to insure sufficient, timely, and dedicated funding, the operational reserve must be properly missioned in accordance with the current National Security Strategy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion shall urge Congress to reform the laws and policies governing the reserve components to provide them programmable sustainability as an operational force; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Defense be directed to, in compliance with those laws and policies, establish missions and funding supporting taskings consistent with the National Defense Authorization Act, the Quadrennial Defense Review, the National Security Strategy, and the National Military Strategy, which directly impact national security and support the readiness of and the rotational nature of the operational reserve.

Resolution No. 22: Guard and Reserve Space-A Travel
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States Department of Defense (DoD) in DoD Regulation 4515.13-R has established a program of travel known as space-available travel—also known as “Space-A”—to allow authorized passengers to occupy DoD aircraft seats that are surplus after all required passengers have been accommodated; and
WHEREAS, The purpose of this privilege was to provide uniformed servicemembers with a respite from the rigors of military service, and to provide retired uniformed service members with recognition for a career of rigorous duty; and
WHEREAS, Under the current rules, Guard and Reserve members qualify for Space-A travel, however, unlike active duty family members, dependents of the Guard and Reserve currently cannot fly Space-A; and
WHEREAS, So called, “gray area” retirees (retirement eligible members of the Guard and Reserve who are under 60 years old) are excluded from traveling outside the continental United States (OCONUS) on Space-A; and
WHEREAS, Both the Guard and Reserve have transitioned from a Strategic Reserve into an Operational Force to meet the exigencies of an all-volunteer force in an era of persistent conflict in which all soldiers, active-duty and reserve-component alike, are expected to regularly deploy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to authorize the Department of Defense to offer space available worldwide travel on military aircraft to dependents of Guard and Reserve members, “gray area” retirees, and widows and widowers of retired members and dependents.

Resolution No. 25: Support for the Non-Federal Roles of the National Guard
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Members of the National Guard swear dual allegiance to support and defend the United States as well as the individual states in which they serve; and
WHEREAS, National Guard units perform invaluable non-federal roles such as quelling domestic civil disturbances, providing relief assistance in man-made or natural disasters, as well as civil defense and drug interdiction functions, and other vital missions as determined by state authorities; and

WHEREAS, National Guard units are often the first relief or rescue forces to provide immediate on-scene response in the event of such emergencies; and

WHEREAS, Past large scale natural and man-made disasters could be repeated across the country requiring the immediate intervention of military units to supplement and assist state and local authorities and our citizenry; and

WHEREAS, Numerous overseas missions are expected to continue; and

WHEREAS, The participation of the National Guard in these traditional non-federal roles may be in danger of being severely limited or even eliminated in some cases; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to retain National Guard units at reasonable readiness levels so that in addition to their active duty missions they may continue to provide civil disturbance and natural and man-made disaster assistance, perform civil defense and drug interdiction functions as well as other essential state or federal roles as required, to include border security.

Resolution No. 28: Reserves and National Guard Retirement Benefit Fairness
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Congress has passed laws that allow Reserve and National Guard members retirement credit points to retire early provided that they served on active duty for 90 consecutive days in a fiscal year and have completed 20 years of service before the age of 60 years; and

WHEREAS, The effective date for this benefit is for those who served after its signing in early 2008; and

WHEREAS, The law signed leaves out all the Reserve and National Guard members who were activated between August 2, 1990 through present that would give them credit for their active duty service toward early retirement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges Congress to amend the law to retroactively allow early retirement for those Reserve and National Guard members who have completed 20 years of service had been activated to Active Federal Duty since August 2, 1990 the same benefit.

Unconventional Forces and Intelligence
Doug Haggan, France, Chairman

Approved

Resolution No. 34: Support Unmanned Vehicles
Origin: Nebraska
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Historically unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, were primarily used for reconnaissance; and

WHEREAS, Currently, military UAVs perform both reconnaissance as well as attack missions; and

WHEREAS, The Coast Guard and U.S. Border Patrol use drones to monitor land and sea to protect oil and gas pipelines; and
WHEREAS, The CIA operates a covert drone program targeting terrorist leaders in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen; and
WHEREAS, The State Department uses surveillance drones to protect U.S. diplomatic personnel; and
WHEREAS, As the war in Afghanistan ends and new threats emerge in the Asia-Pacific region, the Pentagon is considering adapting multiple weapons for drones, including the Cold War-era Hydra 70 rocket and the Laser Homing Attack or Anti-Tank Missile, or LAHAT, according to its latest report on the future of unmanned systems; and
WHEREAS, It is difficult to find any other technology in the Defense Department that in a single decade has made such a tremendous impact on our war-fighting capability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That the U.S. government be encouraged to continue to proceed on a path of transforming America’s armed forces into a modern force capable of providing for the security of all Americans, strengthening and expanding our military capabilities using unmanned vehicles.

Resolution No. 98: Support for the Global War on Terrorism
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
WHEREAS, The American Legion is an organization of wartime veterans created by an act of the United States Congress in 1919; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is committed to the security and defense of the United States and its allies; and
WHEREAS, In any war, continued public support not only for the troops, but also for their mission, is essential for victory; and
WHEREAS, The United States of America was suddenly, and without provocation, attacked by terrorists on September 11, 2001, resulting in the death of nearly 3,000 innocent people, injuring over 6,000 victims, and causing untold economic damage to the nation; and
WHEREAS, This attack was not an isolated event, but one in a long series of terrorist attacks aimed at destroying such core American values as liberty, democracy and respect for human rights; and
WHEREAS, In response to this clear act of war against the United States, Congress authorized the use of military force against those persons and organizations who planned and helped carry out the attack, their affiliates and those that harbored them, and to deter and pre-empt future acts of terrorism; and
WHEREAS, Our service members have made tremendous sacrifices over the past decade in fighting the forces of tyranny and terror; and
WHEREAS, Members of the United States military and intelligence agencies, displaying great courage and commitment to the mission, are still deployed around the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism, including Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Philippines, and elsewhere; and
WHEREAS, While the U.S. and our allies have had great successes in the war on terrorism, most notably the killing of Osama bin Laden, ISIL, associated global terrorist groups, and their sponsors continue to operate in many locations and pose a grave threat to the national security of the United States; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion fully supports the men, women, and leadership of our armed forces as they are engaged in the Global War on Terrorism; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges all Americans and freedom-loving peoples everywhere to stand united in their support of the Global War on
Terrorism, and united in their support of the troops who are engaged in protecting our values and way of life; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the national commander be, and is hereby authorized, to use whatever means at his disposal to disseminate accurate information about the Global War on Terrorism, and to engage whatever means necessary to ensure the united support of the American people.

Resolution No. 106: Establish a Strategic Plan for the Internal Security within the United States
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The American Legion has always recognized the importance of investigations that expose the truth about subversive activities that may harm or seek to destroy our constitutional government; and

WHEREAS, The Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, both security agencies of this nation, perform functions essential to the maintenance of our national security; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion supports the thorough background investigation of all applicants for federal employment to expose possible links to subversive activities or membership in subversive organizations that contribute to the weakening of the internal security of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urges the President and Congress to immediately take such action as may be appropriate and necessary to effectively fund and staff federal intelligence and security agencies at a level that will help protect the United States from foreign espionage, organized crime, terrorism, and subversive activities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the President and Congress to enact legislation and take executive action as necessary to deny subversive individuals or groups the ability to infiltrate and subsequently destroy our government agencies and institutions through federal employment.

Resolution No. 91: Cybersecurity and Identity Theft
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)

WHEREAS, The security of the United States is being increasingly challenged by non-traditional threats which may extend the fields of battle and terrorism to cyberspace warfare; and

WHEREAS, The United States government maintains a comprehensive and integrated system of federal agencies, including the Armed Forces, law enforcement, intelligence, and public health, to detect, deter and defend against cyberspace warfare threats to critical government and private infrastructures; and

WHEREAS, Presidential Decision Directive 62 (PDD-62), titled Combating Terrorism established the National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently discovered two separate but related cybersecurity incidents that have impacted the data of Federal government employees, contractors, members of the armed forces including veterans:

1. In April 2015, OPM discovered that the personnel data of 4.2 million current and former Federal government employees including members of the military and veterans had been stolen; this means information such as full name, birth date, home address and Social Security numbers were affected; and
2. While investigating this incident, in early June 2015, OPM discovered that additional information had been compromised: including background investigation records of current, former, and prospective Federal employees and contractors; and

WHEREAS, OPM has concluded with high confidence that sensitive information—including the Social Security numbers of 21.5 million individuals—was stolen from the background investigation databases; and

WHEREAS, This includes 19.7 million individuals that applied for a background investigation, and 1.8 million non-applicants, primarily spouses or co-habitants of applicants and some records also include findings from interviews conducted by background investigators and approximately 1.1 million include fingerprints; and

WHEREAS, Usernames and passwords that background investigation applicants used to fill out their background investigation forms were also stolen; and

WHEREAS, The Government Printing Office has published registers of Commissioned Navy, Air Force, USMC and Army Officers on an unrestricted basis during the Vietnam Era; and

WHEREAS, These registers were published with Social Security numbers instead of Service Numbers; and

WHEREAS, Sometime later, one or more web-based business organizations digitized these unrestricted registers and subsequently posted the unrestricted registers on the Internet making them publicly available; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion urge Congress to appropriate the necessary funding to combat both international and domestic cybersecurity threats to the United States in the 21st century; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to appropriate the necessary funding to any federal law enforcement agencies for the purpose of searching and removing veterans’ Social Security numbers from publicly available websites found on the Internet; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge federal investigators to request powers from the appropriate court to subpoena specific registers of all military personnel of the United States armed forces to include the U.S. Coast Guard which include Social Security numbers belonging to any public library—which are vulnerable to computer scanning and Internet posting—for the purpose of classifying such registers as “restricted” or “restricted access”; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion also urge the American public to be vigilant of cyberspace attacks, and that all efforts be made to detect, deter, and defend against the threats of cyberspace warfare, and to prosecute violators to the fullest extent of the law.

Mr. Commander, National Officers, and Fellow Delegates. I am particularly pleased to announce the winners of the National Blood Donor Awards for this past year.

Category I - Departments with 100,000 or more members

Post & Individual Participation: Department of California

Category II - 70,000 to 99,999 members

Post & Individual Participation: Department of Minnesota

Category III - 40,000 to 69,999 members

Post & Individual Participation: No Submission

Category IV - 25,000 to 39,999 members

Post & Individual Participation: Department of Colorado

Category V - 10,000 to 24,999 members

Post & Individual Participation: No Submission
Many of our Departments participated in the ROTC Awards Program this year. A total of almost 4,500 medals were awarded to deserving cadets in Senior ROTC and Junior ROTC Units. The winning Departments for 2015-2016 are the Departments of Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, and North Dakota. This speaks well for these Departments and The American Legion in their recognition of the youth of America enrolled in ROTC programs.

Mr. Commander, as a Delegate to this Convention from the Department of Maryland, I move the adoption of this report. ...Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion and a second. Is there any discussion? All in favor, so indicate. All opposed? The report of National Security is adopted.

I will now accept donations for Operation Comfort Warriors. Will National Vice Commander David Gough please assume duties at the podium.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Gough assumed the Chair.

Donations: Operation Comfort Warriors

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): On behalf of the Department of Pennsylvania, Past National Commander Dominic DiFrancesco, Past National Commander Ronald F. Conley, we present you with a check for $27,829.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): On behalf of The American Legion family of Arizona, $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): And from Post 58, Fountain Hills, Arizona, we have another $500.

DELEGATE BRAULT (MA): Louis Brault, Bob Baranowski, Department Commander Ken Starks, Department of Massachusetts, from a run from Chapter 277, a check for $2,500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NH): The Department of New Hampshire donates $1,206.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): From the Department of Idaho, $315.50.

DELEGATE YERMAS (NY): Jim Yermas from the Empire State of New York, $57,161.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): Greetings from the great state of Missouri, the Show-Me State. $3,206.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): The great Garden State of New Jersey is proud to increase our total donations by another $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MN): From the Gopher State, Minnesota, we proudly present a check for $1,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATE SALAK (NE): Good afternoon, Mr. Commander, delegates, and guests. My name is Dave Salak. I'm the department adjutant for the state of Nebraska. With me on stage is my delegation chairman, Mike Reimers; my NECman, Jerry Landkamer; my Alternate NECman, Bill Crosier; and my department commander, Beth Linn. On behalf of the Millard Chapter 374, I'd like to donate $3,477 to OCW.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE(OR): From the great state of Oregon, $10,555.16.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: The American Legion National Sergeant-at-Arms Club donates $500.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER KOUTZ: Thank you all for participating in Operation Comfort Warriors. I hope you go back to your post and do some education. Remember, it's Operation Comfort Warriors, not that other one.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): Mr. Commander, Paris Post 1 donates $700 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: Good afternoon. From China Post 1, the only post in The American Legion operating in exile, $500.

... National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Operation Comfort Warriors total today was $169,959.86! (Applause) Collected today for the Child Welfare Foundation, $13,770.73. That does not include the SAL that has contributed this year $355,995 to the Child Welfare Foundation since last National Convention. (Applause) And not counted previously also was $5,000 from Markey's our sound and stage company for Operation Comfort Warriors. Let's give them a big hand. (Applause)

Presentation: Department Membership Awards

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: It is now time for the membership awards. The departments and individuals who will be joining me on stage are being recognized today for their outstanding membership effort in 2016.

We are now beginning the fourth year of executing The American Legion’s Strategic Plan for Sustained Membership Growth. It is imperative for us to continue working and building on the five priorities within the plan to reverse our current trend of declining membership and promote and encourage a culture of growth throughout The American Legion. These five priorities are: One, create brand awareness; two, communications; three, increase training, education, and leadership development; four, post creation, development and revitalization; and, finally, five, membership recruiting and retention.

The fifth priority in the strategic plan focuses on recruiting and retention. Long-term growth comes from signing up new members and retaining the members we have. It’s simple. If we stick with the basics, we can, and will, continue to grow. Every Legionnaire plays an indispensable role in this effort. We need every member to embrace and help foster a culture of growth if we want to consistently increase membership within our Legion posts.

We want The American Legion to remain a household name with the resources that we provide and our ability to assist all veterans. With the new policy authorized two years ago by the secretary of defense allowing The American Legion and other non-profit entities greater access to military installations to offer support services, we are able to expand our
outreach with the active-duty military, Reserve, and National Guard. This effort needs to continue building relationships at all levels, but specifically at the local level.

American Legion posts are community-based organizations, just like the Guard and Reserve component. Through our Reconnect visits and programs such as Access Granted, Operation Comfort Warriors, the Family Support Network, Soldier's Wish, Temporary Financial Assistance, The American Legion Riders, and many others, we have expanded the opportunity for The American Legion to fulfill the promises of our four pillars. We also need to continue to create American Legion posts on college campuses to further reach out to our student veterans.

Coupled with all of this, with our continued commitment of service to veterans, their families and our communities through district revitalizations, and you can clearly see why The American Legion’s growth potential is unlimited. Close to 2,300 posts received support through revitalizations for the 2015-16 membership year. Today we want to recognize a few departments and individuals for their outstanding efforts in membership. But before we do, I call upon the Membership and Post Activities Committee chairman, Ken Orrock, for remarks.

Remarks: Ken Orrock, Chairman
Membership & Post Activities Committee

Thank you, commander. The recipients of today’s awards are proof that when we commit ourselves to the five priorities in the strategic plan, it works. As leaders of this great organization, we need to continue to find the importance of charging and challenging every individual Legionnaire to buy in to our five-year strategic plan. We have four departments this year who have stayed the course and are ahead of last year’s membership totals traditionally. I would like for each of those departments, when I call your name, to stand up and let us know you're here. Georgia. Mexico. France. And, finally, the Philippines. (Applause)

And new this year, the Department of Idaho reached 100 percent with traditional and DMS administrative transfers while working the District Revitalization program. With that, commander, I yield back my time so you can get on with presenting these awards.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Cushing assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: We're going to do something different a little bit this year. Since the Department of Georgia is a recipient of six different awards, we will present their awards for their recipients at the end of the membership award presentation.

The first presentation will be our 100 percent departments. Four departments have exceeded their 2015-2016 membership goal. There's an outstanding accomplishment and a testament to the motivation of their members and their ability to implement their strategic plan. A shadowbox is being presented to the following department commanders: Mexico, Ron Gregory Abbe. Philippines, Lawrence E. Wade. It should be noted that Mexico exceeded their goal two years in a row. The next award is a plaque and is presented to the department that obtained 100 percent with both traditional membership and DMS transfers due to their diligent efforts in participating in the District Revitalization program this year. Idaho, Ron Derrick. Congratulations, gentlemen. These shadowboxes and plaque are being awarded to you. Your members should take pride in knowing their hard work paid off.

The next series of awards is being presented to each of the four departments previously recognized by the membership chairman for their hard work and dedication in establishing a culture of growth in their departments. The first three departments went above their goal by obtaining over 100 percent by implementing and working the five priorities within the strategic plan. The Department of Georgia will be presented at the end of the program.
The Department of Mexico and the Department of the Philippines have built a foundation in which their membership saw tremendous growth. The first shadowbox is being presented to Ron Gregory Abbe, from the Department of Mexico. The last shadowbox is being awarded to Commander Lawrence Wade of the Department of the Philippines. Thank you, commanders, on a job well done. The next shadowbox will be awarded to Commander Ron Gregory Abbe from the Department of Mexico. The last shadowbox is being awarded to Commander Lawrence Wade of the Department of the Philippines. Thank you, Commanders, for a job well done. (Applause)

The next award presentation will be in recognition for the department commanders who met or exceeded the 100 percent goal before the May target date. Please help me to congratulate our 2016 Department Commanders of the Year. Again, the Department of the Philippines, Lawrence Wade, with 124 percent. And the Department of Mexico, Ron Abbe, at 100.526 percent. (Applause)

Next will be the award earned by the department that met and submitted into national every target date percentage goal for the 2015-2016 membership year. Commander Lawrence Wade, Department of Philippines and Commander Ronald Abbe, Department of Mexico, please accept the Total Target Dates award plaque. (Applause)

This is a membership plaque for the department other than the 50 state departments and the District of Columbia. The North Carolina trophy is being awarded to that department which on March 31 has attained the highest percentage of membership over previous years of final membership, without counting DMS either year. The award plaque winner is the Department of the Philippines. Thank you for a great job. (Applause)

The next presentation will be the Eagle Award. National Commander Barnett continued with the emphasis on membership growth this year. This year, this special incentive award is given to the departments in each category with the highest membership percentage increase from the October, 55 percent target date, to the May, 100 percent target date. Please join me in congratulating the departments: Category 1, Florida with 37.25 percent. Category 2, Texas with 33.87 percent. Category 3, Arizona with 38.51 percent. Category 4, Nebraska with 35.51 percent. Category 5, New Mexico with 39.26 percent. Category 6, the Philippines with 58.94 percent. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Gough assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER GOUGH: The last Eagle Award goes to the national vice commander whose region had the highest percentage increase during the same October to May timeframe. This region finished with a 34.06 percent membership increase. Congratulations to the national vice commander of the Western Region, George E. Cushing. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Davis assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER DAVIS: A district commander's job is one of the most important offices a Legionnaire can hold. It is very demanding but can be very rewarding as well. Our next award is given each year to the top district commanders in five different categories. Unfortunately, Category 4 didn't have a winner. We hope that next year all five categories will have a winner. The District Commander’s Race to the Top award is a prestigious award that is very competitive between district commanders.

Please join me in welcoming the newest top district commanders to the stage, accompanied by their national vice commanders: Category 1, District 35 – Chris O. Bradley, Sr., Department of Alabama. Category 2, District 7 – Dean M. Noechel, Department of Colorado. Category 4 - there was no award. Category 5, District 4 – Aaron R. Cunningham, II, Department of Ohio. (Applause)

These district commanders are being presented a new American Legion cap and a shadowbox. We sincerely appreciate your hard work and dedication. Thank you.

... National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.
NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I am honored and proud to make the next presentations. One department has earned several awards and we wanted to make presentations at one time to the recipients of the Department of Georgia. (Applause)

During my travels as national commander, I have seen membership success due to the right people being in place, and Georgia has the right people in place. They have embraced the culture of growth and they know the result of that growth is the ability to keep fulfilling our mission and adding to it. They have gotten bigger because they took it to heart. It’s indicative that they are doing it right by the amount of awards they are receiving today. Taking the strategic plan priorities and making them their priority has the Department of Georgia in the forefront of award winners. It is no coincidence that my home department has made remarkable strides this year by being the recipient of five membership awards today and one awarded at the membership dinner this past Saturday night, The O.L. Bodenhamer Trophy Award Plaque.

Making the District Revitalization program and membership recruiting and retention their priority and embracing my theme, “Duty. Honor. Country,” the Department of Georgia has gone above and over the norm. Incorporating the three P’s of membership, people, passion and planning. They have contributed to sustain membership growth for this past year as well as the previous year, and I have every confidence they’ll continue to do so in the future.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Cushing assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: Our next award is the General Henri Gouraud Trophy Plaque. General Gouraud led France’s Fourth Army during World War I. This plaque is given to the first department in each category to exceed its national membership goal. The categories are the same as those used in the Big 12 competition. This year only one department qualified. Commander Thom Mash, Department of Georgia, please come up to receive this award. (Cheers and applause)

The O.L. Bodenhamer Trophy is presented to the department within the United States that is number one in traditional membership as of the June Flag Day membership report. The award is named after Past National Commander O.L. Bodenhamer, who was elected in 1929 and affectionately referred to in *The American Legion* Monthly as “Bodie.” He was appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt to deliver emergency relief funds during the height of the Great Depression. This is a significant award named after a distinguished leader.

This year’s winning department achieved 100.323 percent of their goal by the June 14 deadline. The 2016 Bodenhamer Trophy winner is the Department of Georgia! (Applause)

The Department of Georgia is the recipient of the 100 percent Department Membership Award Shadowbox, traditional membership, and the Culture of Growth Award Shadowbox. This is the second year in a row that Georgia is 100 percent. (Applause)

District Commander Mark Shreve is the recipient of the Category 3 Race to the Top award. This is also the second year in a row that Mark is the Race to The Top award winner. Mark is receiving a shadowbox, a Legion polo and a new Legion cap that reads “Race to the Top – Category III- 2016.”

Congratulations, Commander Mash and District Commander Shreve.

**Presentation: National Recruiter of the Year**

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: It is now time to hand out our most prestigious membership award. This year’s National Recruiter of the Year introduced 818 new members to The American Legion! She is the first woman Legionnaire to win this award. This Legionnaire took to heart the fifth priority in the strategic plan by focusing on membership recruiting. This is also the second year in a row that Georgia has had the
Recruiter of the Year, the seventh time in 13 years, but this is her first time to the stage as National Recruiter of the Year. It’s also important to note that this is her 13th year as a Gold Brigade recipient! Her first year was in 2003. Please join me in congratulating Patricia E. Liddell, Department of Georgia. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Hargreaves assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: Commander Barnett is presenting a new American Legion cap that reads “2016 National Membership Recruiter of the Year,” a shadowbox plaque, a ring and a polo shirt to Patricia for her title of National Recruiter of the Year for the 2016 Membership Year. Will Patricia continue winning this award, or is one of our fellow Legionnaires setting their sights on being in this spot next year? Remember, any veteran may be a potential member. Just ask.

DELEGATE LIDDELL (GA): Thank you. Thank you. Georgia left Georgia and went to Great Lakes, and that's where he was discharged from the Navy. He met Mississippi, and Georgia and Mississippi produced Chicago. So Chicago. I would like to thank Commander Barnett, Adjutant Wheeler, the delegates and distinguished guests.

Lord, this is rough. I said I wasn't going to be nervous. I have to tell you all there's a song out that says: I believe I can fly. But I'm flying. And I have to tell you all who the wind is beneath my wings. My commander, Vickie Smith Dykes, my adjutant, please stand, Hazel Taylor. My senior vice, who is not here because he had commitments, but he was last year's National Recruiter, Edgar Johnson. My traveling buddies, Mark Shreve, who is Race to the Top, Sara Anderson and Rachel Cesar.

This is the wind beneath my wings. And, yes, I am flying. And as the national vice commander said, anybody can do this. My goal is still a thousand members. I am The American Legion, for God and country. Failure is not an option. Still serving veterans, our nation's lifeline and our nation's hero. My family, thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: Congratulations, Patricia! We know that you are already hard at work recruiting even more members into our organization. ... National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

Presentation: Consolidated Post Reporting 2015-2016

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Consolidated Post Report is a summary of what American Legion posts have accomplished in their communities. It’s an opportunity to tell the story of your post on an easy-to-fill-out form either on hard-copy or online. When I testified before Congress last fall, I used the data from this annual report as part of my testimony. For the 2015-2016 reporting year, 8,820 posts reported out of 13,159. This is a response rate of 67 percent. Consolidated Post Reporting is an area we really need help with from the departments and districts to emphasize to our posts the importance of this report. This report truly shows what The American Legion is doing in our local communities. Our posts are so critical. We need for them to report what they are doing each and every day in communities across this great nation.

At this time I wish to recognize those departments who worked on submitting these reports. A certificate was mailed to the departments who met the challenge of a 75 percent response rate this year. These departments are: Florida, Idaho, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia. They deserve a round of applause. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: James Gallagher, Department of Delaware; Thomas Mash, Department of Georgia; George Scarborough, Department of
Missouri; James Grosset, Department of Montana; Michael Reimers, Department of Nebraska; John Graham, Department of New Hampshire; Michael Jones, Department of Oregon; James Chapman, Department of Virginia; and Dale Oatman, Department of Wisconsin, being received by Dan Seehafer. \( \text{(Applause)} \)

... National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I want to thank each and every post that submitted a report. Every report is important, but we still have a way to go before we can correctly represent before Congress all the great work our posts are doing in our communities.

**Presentation: National Emergency Fund Awards**

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The National Emergency Fund is perhaps one of the most visible ways we demonstrate our “devotion to mutual helpfulness” to our fellow Legionnaires. But it is not unusual for longtime Legionnaires to say that they had not heard of the National Emergency Fund. When I was elected your national commander in Baltimore, I placed the National Emergency Fund as my main program. I also challenged you to raise 50 cents for every member in your department. If every department had met their individual challenge, we would have raised \$1,000,000 for the NEF.

We did not currently accomplish that goal, but I think that a major reason is that during most of my tenure as your national commander we were fortunate to not have an extremely busy year in terms of frequent and significant natural disasters. That has certainly changed with the recent devastating flooding in Louisiana and wildfires in California.

The NEF will be there to take care of affected members, with individuals receiving up to \$3,000 and posts receiving up to \$10,000, but through most of this year the disasters were not as frequent. And for that I’m very thankful.

And I am most thankful to know that, when there is a need, Legionnaires don’t hesitate to respond. Our history as an organization has been one of giving and caring for our Legion Family members, and this caring, I believe, shows best when a disaster strikes our communities. We open our hearts and pockets to embrace our members and communities with the care and assistance they need to get back on their feet. We are a big family, and a family helps each other when the need is there.

Because of your generous donations since the NEF’s creation in 1989, we have been able to provide almost \$9 million to those family members who were displaced. Remember that each and every dollar donated to the National Emergency Fund is used for this purpose. We take care of our own when they need help. Departments are encouraged to assign, or, better yet, seek volunteers to be department NEF coordinators who can travel and assist fellow Legion members in the processing and submission of NEF applications.

In this way, we can help ensure that our Legion Family members are assisted during a most troubling and challenging time. It is great to know that when a Legion member needs help, the Legion Family will step up and give without reservation. And it is because of your continued giving that we are able to sustain that goal. I think we all deserve a round of applause. \( \text{(Applause)} \)

Those department commanders who met and exceeded my NEF challenge before August 1 will be presented a plaque. We have six departments being recognized today for exceeding my challenge by August 1.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Hargreaves assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: There were six departments that met the NEF challenge and exceeded 100 percent of their fundraising goal. They are: the Department of Delaware; Department of the District of Columbia; Department of
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Georgia; Department of Mississippi; Department of Nebraska; and the Department of New Mexico. (Applause)

Congratulations! Thank you for your hard work and ensuring Legion Family members in local communities know where to turn during a natural disaster. So, please continue your fundraising efforts because we never know when and where the next natural disaster will strike and interrupt someone’s lives. At this time, I would like to ask those departments that would like to present checks for the National Emergency Fund to come forward and make your presentations now.

Donations to the National Emergency Fund

PAST NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HAGGAN (FR): Doug Haggan, Department of France, FODPAL secretary. A couple of months ago it was requested of us to give a larger than normal donation to the NEF, and I would like to turn it over to the FODPAL treasurer, Mr. Jimmie Foster.

PASST NATIONAL COMMANDER FOSTER (AK): I'm the FODPAL treasurer, the man with all the dough. $1,000. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): Department of Idaho, $1,646.83.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): The Department of Arizona, $4,100.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): On behalf of the Department of Pennsylvania, Past National Commander Dominic DiFrancesco and Past National Commander Ronald F. Conley, we have a check for $21,000.

DELEGATE YERMAS (NY): James Yermas from the beautiful state of New York, home of the two presidential candidates: $11,658.

DELEGATE GRAHAM (NH): John Graham from the Department of New Hampshire. We have an additional donation of $1,500.

DELEGATE PETERSON (IA): I'm Jim Peterson, delegate chairman from the great Tall Corn State of Iowa. With me is Rich Anderson, our retired service officer and our commander, Ken Rochholz. And from the Iowa State Walk for Awareness at the State Fair, $2,587.04; from the Iowa American Legion, $1,000; from the Iowa American Legion Past District Commanders Club, $200; and from my home post, Peterson Post 431 of Gowrie, Iowa, $250. And our total is $4,037.04.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): The great Garden State of New Jersey would like to proudly increase our final donation by another $3,000. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OR): From the great state of Oregon, an additional $346.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): Commander Barnett, the great state of Ohio, the Buckeye State, your host for this 98th National Convention, would like to donate $2,000 to your NEF program.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): In addition to the $4,100 from the Department of Arizona, John Ivens Post 42, $1,000, NEF.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): And an additional $500 from Fountain Hills post, Arizona, which brings their total to $1,000, or over $2 per capita per member.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MN): From the Land of 10,000 Lakes, Department of Minnesota, where your national commander first learned to drive a snowmobile this year. In addition to a previous donation of $2,313.80, today we are adding another $1,000.

DELEGATE STARKS (MA): Department Commander Ken Starks and my predecessor, Past Department Commander Lou Brault, Department of Massachusetts, where it all began: $5,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): From the great state of Texas, Austin, Texas, William B. Travis Post 76, $5,100.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): The Fighting 5th District, Department of Michigan, proudly donates $500 to NEF. Go Blue!
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: China Post 1, $500.

DELEGATE BRYANT (OK): Bobby Bryant, past department commander from the great state of Oklahoma, the new Oklahoma. This is our commander, Don Kuntze. And we did meet the commander's request of $10,001.

DELEGATE COLON (PR): Pedro Colon, commander of the department of sunny Puerto Rico. We are presenting an additional check for $2,000 to complete $2,706.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): From the great state of Missouri, home of the World Series Champion Kansas City Royals, $10,035.

DELEGATE RAMOS (FL): Jim Ramos from the Department of Florida with the NEC, Dennis Boland, $5,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): The Department of France, birthplace of The American Legion, with our partner Paris Post No. 1, we're proud to present $500 to the National Emergency Fund. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AR): Department of Arkansas, $2,024.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): Department of North Dakota, $7,331 and another $500 from the Sons of The American Legion from North Dakota.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: On behalf of the Central States Caucus, we're donating $1,025.

DELEGATE DUNHAM (SD): The proud state of South Dakota, the birthplace of American Legion Baseball, and the home of Mt. Rushmore, donates $1,808.42.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): Man-O-War Post No. 8 out of Lexington, Kentucky, proudly presents $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): Good afternoon from the great Department of Illinois, Post 24, Champaign. And with me, my immediate past commander, Paul Gardner, and our DEC Wayne Wagner and our Alternate DEC Bernie Stitemuller. Post 24 would like to present a check of $524.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): The great state of Illinois donates $3,185.93.

DELEGATE SEEHAFER (WI): Department of Wisconsin, $604.56.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (DC): District of Columbia and the Washington Redskins, $1,000. ... National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: NEF donations today totaled $108,929.48. Thank you. (Applause)

It's amazing when everything comes together with all the different charities that we have. It makes me feel so proud to be a member of this organization. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your generosity and your love for our veterans.

Announcements

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The national adjutant wishes to inform all of us that doors open at 6:00 a.m., the Convention opens at 8:00 a.m., and candidate Donald Trump's presentation is slated to start at 9:00 a.m.

Please rise. Legionnaires, please join me in a salute to the Flag of the United States of America. One! ... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Two! The time is now 1613 hours. The Convention will stand in recess until 8:00 a.m. tomorrow.

... At 4:13 p.m., the Convention was recessed to reconvene the following day, September 1, 2016, at 8:00 a.m.
... At 8:00 a.m., the delegates assembled for the third day of the 98th Annual National Convention and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our program, please join me in a round of applause for Rick Pedro, maestro. Thank you, Rick. (Applause)

The convention will come to order. Colors of our nation in place, hand salute.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Two! Please uncover. I now call upon our acting national chaplain, Randy Cash, for the invocation.

Invocation
Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North Carolina, Acting National Chaplain

Let us pray. Our Father, as we begin this new day which You have made, grant us the assurance of Your presence that we may face today with confidence and with the courage which You alone can give. Lord, we seek Your holy inspiration in our lives. As You inspire the prophets of old, inspire us to stand against that which is wrong and give us the courage to do those things which are right. Grant us Your wisdom. Grant us courage, and for the living of this day we give You thanks. In Your most holy name I pray, amen.

Pledge of Allegiance

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Chaplain Cash. Please remain uncovered. Ladies and gentlemen, I call upon National Sergeant-at-Arms Daniel Zimmerman, to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

... At this time, the delegates recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Please recover. Be seated. The convention is now in session.

I will tell you the next group of announcements, I'm not sure I can get through them. Not because they're long, but because they're long on commitment. When Mr. Dan Wheeler, our national adjutant, gave me these numbers today, it brought tears to my eyes. Because, see, we had some donations again last night and we had the staff tallying, and we're going to call for some more donations this morning for those folks who may not have had the opportunity, but we got $6,000 more from some of the excess things that I had that you gave donations for, $6,000. My good friends in the Southern Block had a turn-in yesterday of $11,956. (Applause)

And it also included $1,000 donation from a very dear family to me from Douglasville, Georgia, the Pulver family, who also made a very, very generous donation as part of that $11,000. Let's give them a big hand. And if the Pulver family is here, would you please rise. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Well, that's not the news that I got you all psyched up about. You want the number. Right now, as we start the final day of our convention, the grand total for 2015-2016 from The American Legion Families, as we add up all the charities from the Auxiliary, the SAL, The American Legion, is $8,112,077! Give yourself a big hand. (Applause)

I can't tell you how much that means to me, how much it means to veterans, what it means to their families. God bless you for doing that.
Presentation: The American Legion Fourth Estate Award
Dale Barnett, Georgia, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We begin this morning by recognizing outstanding achievements in journalism that had a positive impact on a community. The American Legion Fourth Estate Award is difficult to earn. It is a testament to the demanding nature of the competition and the quality of entries. Not only do the reports have to be informative and entertaining, they have to provide a tangible benefit to society.

Broadcast Category
WXIA-TV Atlanta, Georgia

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Being honored in the Broadcast Category is WXIA-TV, an NBC affiliate in Atlanta. Chief Investigative Reporter Brendan Keefe revealed a serious communications problem between emergency dispatchers and cell phones called in in his 10-part series “9-1-1: Lost on the Line.” As a result of the broadcasts, both the private sector and the government have called for improvements, which would make us all safer. Please turn your attention to the video monitors.

At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion 2016 Fourth Estate Award For outstanding achievement in the field of journalism is presented to WXIA-11 Alive for its 10-part series, “911: Lost on the Line.” This Atlanta-based NBC affiliate told the shocking story of Shanell Anderson, a 31-year-old woman who drowned in a sinking car while calling 911 from her cell phone. Brendan Keefe’s reporting has encouraged software developers to launch new apps, Georgia legislators to demand answers, and the FCC to call for 911 Center improvements. “911: LOST ON THE LINE.” Presented at the 98th National Convention, September 1, 2016, Cincinnati, Ohio.

BRENDAN KEEFE: Thank you. Thank you very much. I was worried this early in the morning it would be an empty hall, but it seems like there's a lot of retired military here who not only got up before me this morning but made a bed so tight you could bounce a quarter off of it. (Laughter)

But I also have a feeling you're waiting to hear from someone else at this podium, so I'll make my remarks brief. Thank you to The American Legion for this distinct honor. The Fourth Estate Award is coveted by journalists because it is bestowed by men and women who served this nation with courage and because this award acknowledges the power and responsibility of a free press to shape public opinion by informing the electorate. I dedicate this award to my father, Staff Sergeant Daniel Thomas Keefe. I think I brought a photo of him with me, U.S. Army retired. Hopefully we can put that up. (Applause)

There he is. Here you can see him in Fulda, Germany, as part of the occupying forces after World War II. He'd lost his brother, my Uncle Franny, over the Pacific, and still, of course, went overseas himself. I'm pictured 55 years later embedded as a reporter with U.S. Army combat engineers in Kirkuk, Iraq. You may notice we're both smoking cigars out of the same corner of our mouth, separated by more than half a century. I only wish I'd found these two photos of us posing next to comrades in combat before my father was buried with full military honors a decade ago. My father carried a rifle. I carry a camera. But we were both defending democracy. (Applause)

Because I'm here to tell you that an informed electorate is the cornerstone of any successful democratic republic. Blaming the media has become a national pastime. If you can't combat the message, shoot the messenger. Sometimes that criticism is unwarranted,
but I'm here to tell you oftentimes it's not. Many of the media's wounds are self-inflicted. We live in a fascinating time where anyone can publish their thoughts to the world with no media filter whatsoever. But this news landscape rewards speed over accuracy. Getting it right has lost out to getting it right now. (Applause)

There's an entire industry of fake news websites, literally fake news websites winning clicks and advertising revenue, operating like a manual virus where we are willing if unwitting hosts happily spreading false rumors. We are all guilty of clicking "share" before conducting a basic Google search to see if that salacious headline is even remotely true. Meanwhile, print newspapers are vanishing right before our eyes and the 24-hour cable news outlets have chosen political sides, marketing their stories to the political left or to the right. And all of us as viewers share the blame by selecting a single news source that most closely aligns with our already firmly held political beliefs.

I'm here to argue that local television news is the last bastion of aggressive, fair investigative journalism with no agenda. And I am fortunate enough to work for leaders who believe in giving us both the time and the resources to answer more than just who, what, where and when, but the most important part of the story: Why. Why did this happen? How can we fix it?

That is how we discovered the 911 system was broken, and, more importantly, why it was broken. If I call 911 right now from a phone in this arena in Cincinnati, the call is just as likely to go across the river to Covington, Kentucky, and answered by a 911 center there across the river. Emergency crews would be searching for me in the wrong state because the same cell phone that can summon an Uber car or a pizza to this arena, well, the emergency dispatchers don't have the advantage of all those things your smartphone can do, and they simply can't find us in life-and-death situations. We have to fix this.

Our 13-part investigation led to the invention of a simple fix that is now patented. The inventors saw our story and they identified the problem, and in the great tradition of American ingenuity, they set about solving it. The solution they invented will save countless lives. It's now patented all because a local TV news story started with a single call for help in Georgia, a brave woman named Shanell Anderson trapped in her sinking car, you just heard her voice, her last words, summoning help. And she drowned in her sinking car on the phone with a 911 dispatcher because the system couldn't locate the pond in time to save her life.

I am humbled to accept The American Legion Fourth Estate Award, but I am also concerned there aren't enough journalistic boots on the ground. We need more investigative reporters, the special forces of the journalism world, to fight the good fight with no other agenda than pursuing the truth. It's easy to criticize the news media, because much of that criticism has been earned. But do not believe those who tell you that aggressive, independent, objective, investigative journalism is dead. It is alive and well and worth fighting for. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Before the next presentation, I have an announcement. We are conducting a survey of women veterans. If you are a woman veteran, please come to my left, your right, there's a bank of computers, and please take the survey. This will help us greatly understand the needs of our women veterans.

Online Category
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Fourth Estate Internet/News Media Award goes to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel for its series “Hidden Errors.” Reporter Ellen Gabler revealed that medical laboratories across the nation are not following basic policies and procedures designed to ensure the accuracy of test results. These mistakes have led to broken families, unimaginable stress and even death. The many examples
shown in the print and Web editions of the series spurred training efforts, policy reviews and discussions among federal regulators and industry leaders. Here is a look at the award-winning series. ... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Ellen Gabler. (Applause)

ELLEN GABLER: Hello. Thank you so much for having us and for this wonderful award. I want to first thank all of you in The American Legion for your service to our country and also the community that you've built. My grandfather was a member of The American Legion in Minnesota. (Applause)

And all 14 of us grandkids still wear his red commander jacket when we take trips to the Dairy Queen in the summer, when it's cold, of course.

But I also want to thank you for your support of the Fourth Estate. I'm very lucky to work at a place like the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. I work there because of my wonderful bosses who are committed to investigative reporting. Investigative reporting takes a lot of time, takes a lot of money, and there aren't enough local and national news organizations that are dedicated to it.

I spend my time as an investigative reporter trying to uncover things that people don't want you to know. I always say the only kind of secrets that are good are secrets about surprise parties and birthday presents. But unfortunately there's a lot of secrets out there. And for this story I spent many months trying to, first of all, just get the basic records I needed to tell the story. So I put in requests for the federal government. It was very difficult to get these records. And, again, these were just pretty basic records telling us what's happening in the medical laboratories that do the tests, that do the medical tests that you and I receive every single year.

I still get calls. I probably get a call once a week from a person who has stumbled across my story online, and a lot of the time they are very upset. Sometimes they're crying because they have run into some sort of problem with their medical test and they have nowhere else to turn. And so, you know, they find my article, realize that there's other people in their same situation, and they call me hoping I can do something about it.

So on that note, I'd just like to encourage you to remain involved and active members of your community. Keep reading your local newspapers. Be engaged. Pay attention to what's going on in your community. And when you see problems out there, tell somebody about it. Do something about it.

I think too often it's easy to just look the other way and hope that somebody else is going to solve the problem. But we really need your attention and your engagement to speak out when you see something that needs to be fixed. Thank you very much. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion 2016 Fourth Estate Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Journalism is presented to Ellen Gabler, investigative reporter, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, for a series of investigative reports of the inaccuracies of test results. The in-depth probe brought about training efforts, policy reviews and discussions among federal regulators and industry leaders. “Hidden Errors,” presented at the 98th National Convention, September 1, 2016, Cincinnati, Ohio.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Ellen, for your efforts. And we applaud you.

Print Category
Marine Corps Times, Springfield, Virginia

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: This year’s Print Category Award goes to The Marine Corps Times for its series, “Inside the Gender Experiment.” Reporter Hope
Seck examined the impact the requirement to open new combat jobs to female Marines is having in the close-knit community of Marine Corps infantry. Elements of the series have been published in USA Today and cited by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus. Ms. Seck, who now works for Military.com, was one of only four reporters granted access to the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force at Twentynine Palms, California, and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Please turn your attention once again to the monitor.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Please join me in welcoming Ms. Hope Seck. (Applause)

HOPE SECK: My first journalism job out of college was as a military and veterans reporter at a newspaper that some of you may have had occasion to read at some point in your life, The Daily News of Jacksonville, North Carolina, serving Marine Corps base Camp Lejeune and the surrounding community. As I look back now, I realize that I was completely military illiterate when I started that job. I couldn't even read rank. And my saving grace was the veterans service organizations of Jacksonville, including The American Legion, which surrounded me with care, answered my questions, no matter how stupid, invited me to their events, and made sure every time that I got the story right.

I also got to know these veterans and was constantly impressed and humbled at how they committed their lives to service. Many of these men and women would plan their entire weeks around ways to serve the community, especially the young Marines and sailors who were daily deploying and their families. And because of that, I knew the town very well because they knew the town very well. And some of my best and most interesting stories were a result of tips that I got from them.

By the time I left Jacksonville, I was pretty fluent in Marine. I knew the difference between an ASVAB and an MRAP and where to find a box of grid squares and keys to the Humvee. And so I decided to stay in military journalism, and daily I am reminded of what an honor it is to even witness and be part of the military community.

I have cried with 24-year-old mothers of two who are now Gold Star wives with husbands killed in action and marveled at their bravery. I have shared jokes with Marines down range in Afghanistan and enjoyed their hospitality and been impressed at their commitment to their work and the excellence with which they do everything. And this continues. And it is a great honor and a privilege to work with this community daily. And I'll never forget that.

Perhaps a lot of you may be critical of the media, and rightly so. A lot of times we're not as well-informed on the issues as we should be, and we're not as impartial and balanced as our readers deserve. But I'm heartened and encouraged that The American Legion makes it a priority to encourage and incentivize good journalism like the stories that we've heard about today. And this continues. And it is a great honor and a privilege to work with this community daily. And I'll never forget that.

So thank you sincerely for this award. I'm deeply grateful and amazed. And I will do my best to make you proud. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion 2016 Fourth Estate Award for Outstanding Achievement in the field of Print Journalism is presented to Hope Seck, investigative reporter, Marine Corps Times. “Inside the Gender Experiment” looks at the impact the recent requirement to open new combat jobs to female Marines would have in the close-knit community of Marine Corps infantry. Elements of the series have been published in USA Today and cited by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. The series is a must-read for anyone interested in this major cultural and seismic shift that will occur in Marine Corps infantry. Presented at the 98th National Convention, September 1, 2016, Cincinnati, Ohio. (Applause)

... At this time, the delegation viewed a series of videos.
NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: Soldier's Wish is an organization that is dedicated to meeting needs for military personnel veterans and their families. By the authority of our National Executive Committee, The American Legion has established an official relationship with this outstanding group. Please welcome the executive director of Soldier's Wish, Mark Ochsenbein. (Applause)

**Presentation: Mark Ochsenbein**

**Soldier’s Wish**

Hello, everybody. My name is Mark Ochsenbein. I'm a former Green Beret and was a special operations helicopter pilot. I want to tell you what's great now is I'm a Legionnaire with Post 211, Woodward, Iowa. Hello, Iowa. *(Cheers and applause)*

What I want to tell you, I do volunteer work for an outstanding charity named Soldier's Wish. Moreover, I want to tell you what an honor it is to be here amongst some great Americans, Americans like you.

Soldier's Wish is a charity that supports all our servicemen and women to include their families. We make wishes come true by meeting their unmet needs. I'm so glad you great Americans are here with me this morning to help Soldier's Wish grant a wish for a Legionnaire, Bill Welyczko, from Middletown, New York. *(Applause)*

I'll tell you, I called Bill on the phone. And he's from Queens, and I was trying to understand what he was saying. I said: How do you pronounce your last name? He kept going: Wel-lets-go. He said it's a good Irish name. And I appreciate you being here. However, before we grant this wish, I want to say we could not have done this wish without the tremendous support of the New York State American Legion Auxiliary. *(Applause)*

Over the past year, under the leadership of Ms. Jan Mahoney, her project as president was to raise funds to help those veterans affected by Agent Orange. Jan, I just want to say thanks to you and the New York Auxiliary for their efforts because the wish today is to assist a veteran who has been battling cancer due to the exposure of Agent Orange during his time in Vietnam.

So let me say a few words about Bill. Bill, yes, he's originally from Queens, New York. He's going to get a chance to say a few words, and a few of you will be able to understand him, those from New York. He served in the Army, went through basic training AIT at Fort Riley. He became a squad leader and left for Vietnam. He was assigned to A Company, 5th Battalion, 60th Mechanized Infantry, and you mech guys out there understand what that means. Bill was wounded on three separate occasions, receiving the Purple Heart on three different times. Bill finally left the Army in May of 1968. In 2014 he was diagnosed by the VA in New York with lung cancer due to exposure of Agent Orange. Part of his right lung was removed in November of '14, and only 30 days later he had to have his left kidney removed.

Once he left the hospital, he did not receive healthcare or chemotherapy treatment, but on the second opinion he was told: You need to be getting your post-surgery chemotherapy. He was turned down for this treatment and had to pay for it out of his own pocket. Because of this treatment, his cancer went into remission. But three weeks ago more nodules were discovered, and it appears they are cancerous.

The financial burden has left a tremendous hardship on both he and his wife. Both Bill and his wife are totally disabled. In addition, the social worker failed to file his disability claim, which he has lost just months and months of disability payments.

So this is where Soldier's Wish, with the help from the New York American Legion Auxiliary, stepped in to help this most deserving veteran. Bill, we thank you for your service. And along with the New York Auxiliary, we at Soldier's Wish hope that this check for $5,000 will help ease the financial burden. *(Applause)*
We hope that this financial burden of chemotherapy that was placed upon you and your wife as a result of being exposed to Agent Orange will help your burden of this financial debt. Bill, we love you, brother. We pray for you that you will beat this dreadful disease. And we can't say enough about your service, and welcome home. Bill, would you like to say a couple of words? (Applause)

BILL WELYCZKO: Thank you very much. I'll just make this short. I want to thank The American Legion and the Soldier's Wish Foundation for everything that they did for me today, to make it possible for me to be here today. You don't know how much this means to me and my family. And I'm proud to be a member of The American Legion. Thank you very much. (Applause)

JAN MAHONEY: Good morning. It's a proud moment being able to help and honor this veteran. As a representative of the Department of New York, American Legion family, I thank them for their support in this project. Because of their donations, we are able to be here today and for many days hopefully to come to help our veterans suffering from Agent Orange. I thank Soldier's Wish for partnering with me, and I thank you all for honoring this veteran. Thank you. (Applause)

MARK OCHSENBEIN: You know, I just realized, Jan told me that she lost her husband in 2009 to the results of him being exposed to Agent Orange. Legionnaires, in an effort to continue our help with veterans, I just want to say that Soldier's Wish will be teaming up once again this year with Subway restaurants to raise money for our active duty personnel veterans and their families. This year we will be in 12 markets covering several states surrounding Oklahoma. Where's Oklahoma? (Cheers and applause)

All right. So if you see Soldier's Wish advertised by Subway to help our veterans in your area, please visit a Subway often to help us help a veteran. Also, if you would like to get on that smartphone of yours and you want to text "soldier" to 91999, we'll take your dollar also. So, anyway, God bless you, Bill, God bless The American Legion Family, and God bless this country we call the United States of America. Hoohah. (Applause)

... At this time, the delegation viewed a series of videos. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARGREAVES: We are going to take the additional donations now. If you would please meet me on the rope line, I will take your checks. Then I will announce them from the podium. If you would please meet me down here on my left, your right, the main corridor.

... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

ACTING NATIONAL CHAPLAIN CASH: We have three checks this morning from the Department of Washington. First for Operation Comfort Warrior, $716. For the National Emergency Fund, $1,103.58. And for the Children & Youth Endowment Fund, $4,334. (Applause)

... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, I would be honored to introduce our next guest. A graduate of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania, our next guest built a number of highly successful international real estate, sports and entertainment businesses. With more than seven million social media followers, his name is synonymous with skyscrapers, hotels, resorts and other assets associated with his brand.

His campaign website promises that he will ensure that veterans have convenient access to the best quality health care. His plan includes support not just for physical health care but for invisible wounds as well. On immigration, he promises to build a wall along our southern border which will be paid for by Mexico. He wants to defund sanctuary cities, return all criminal aliens to their home country and triple the number of Immigration and
Thank you so much. What a great honor and privilege to speak to you today. The American Legion is very, very special. So thank you very much. I want to thank Commander Dale Barnett, your vice commanders, and your constitutional officers. You have all done such an incredible job. The fact is: You are incredible people. (Applause)

The men and women of The American Legion represent the best, absolute best, of America. Strength, courage, selfless devotion. Your organization and its members have done so much to defend our country, our flag, and to advance the cause of Americanism, not Globalism. Remember: America first. America first. You're one group I don't have to tell you to remember it also. You know it. We are in your debt very deeply. I will never let you down. (Applause)

Together, we are going to work on so many shared goals. But I want to begin by discussing one goal that I know is so important to you: Promoting American pride and patriotism in America's schools. Very important. (Applause)

In a Trump administration, I plan to work directly with The American Legion to uphold our common values and to help ensure they are taught to America's children. We want our kids to learn the incredible achievements of America's history, its institutions, and its heroes, many of whom are with us today, I can tell you, including, by the way, two special people, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Senator Jeff Sessions. They're right here. We will stop apologizing for America and we will start celebrating America. (Applause)

We will be united by our common culture, values and principles, becoming one American nation, one country, under one constitution, saluting one American Flag. And always saluting it. (Applause)

The flag all of you helped to protect and preserve. That flag deserves respect, and I will work with The American Legion to help to strengthen respect for our flag. You see what's happening. It's very, very sad. And, by the way, we want young Americans to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. (Applause)

In addition to teaching respect for the flag, we also have to make sure we give our military the tools they need to defend that flag and to deter violence and aggression from our foreign adversaries, of which there are many. We will rebuild our depleted military and pursue a state-of-the-art missile defense. We will do it based on those three very famous words: Peace through strength. (Applause)

We will make sure our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have the best equipment, training, tools anywhere in the world. Nobody will be able to compete with us. And we will ensure that they will have the best medical care in the world, both in service and when they return home as civilians. (Applause)

That will require a total reform of the veterans administration. It's in very sad shape. I deal with veterans all the time. We have tremendous veteran support, and the stories I hear are so sad. We're not going to have that anymore. I’ve laid out a ten-step VA reform plan you can review on my website. Here are the basics: I will appoint a secretary of Veterans Affairs whose personal mission will be to clean up the VA. The secretary’s sole mandate will be to serve our veterans, not bureaucrats, not politicians, but our great veterans. (Applause)

I am going to use every lawful authority to remove and discipline anyone who fails our veterans or breaches the public trust, which is what it is. It's a public trust. I will appoint a commission to investigate all the wrongdoing at the VA, and there's plenty, and then present those findings to Congress as the basis for reforming the entire system. We are going to get you fantastic service. It's going to happen. Believe me. We'll ensure every
veteran in America gets timely access to top-quality care, including the best care in the world for our female veterans. (Applause)

The veterans health system will remain a public system, because it is, after all, a public trust. But never again will we allow any veteran to suffer or die waiting for care. That means veterans will have the right to go to a VA facility or the right to see a private doctor or clinic of their choice, whatever is the fastest and best for veterans. People are not going to die waiting in line to see a doctor. It's not going to happen. (Applause)

The veteran will be in total control. Should I have the honor of serving as president, we are also going to start facing the world with confidence again. We are going to uphold the laws of the nation and defend our sovereignty and security, and we are going to defend our border. (Applause)

I just came back from a wonderful meeting with the president of Mexico where I expressed my deep respect for the people of his country and for the tremendous contributions of Mexican-Americans in our country. They have made tremendous contributions. Many are in our armed services. You know how good they are. I want to again thank him for his gracious hospitality and express my belief that we can work together to accomplish great things for both countries. That's Mexico and the United States. We agreed in the meeting on the need to stop the illegal flow of guns, drugs, cash and people across the border and to take out the cartels. Have to get rid of those cartels, and we have to do it quickly. Our country is being poisoned. Our country is being poisoned.

We're also talking about, and talked about, the importance of working to keep jobs and wealth in our hemisphere. A more prosperous Mexico means fewer illegal border crossings and a better market for products made in the United States. When I am president, I am going to look at every trade deal we have across the world and see what steps must be taken to protect American jobs and create new opportunities for American worker. The American worker has been forgotten, and we're not going to let that happen. (Applause)

We will fight for every last American job. And we will have friendships with other countries, but they will not take advantage of us any longer, that I can tell you. We're going to show ourselves and the world again what a strong and growing American economy can look like. We are going to give major tax relief to every worker and small business in this country, bring thousands of new companies and millions of new jobs back to our shores, and unleash an American energy revolution, which we have to do.

We will also be appointing justices of the United States Supreme Court who you will be very proud, you will be extremely proud when we name them. You've already seen some of the people and the kind of people that we want. Justice Scalia, passed away recently, serves as an absolute perfect focal point. He is the kind of person we want for the United States Supreme Court. (Applause)

I will nominate men and women to the court who meet the high standard of Justice Scalia and judges who have the wisdom and integrity to follow the law and just not make it up any way they want to make it up. (Applause)

Above all, these next four years I will be uncompromising in the defense of the United States and our friends and our good allies. We are going to end the era of nation building and create a new foreign policy, joined by our partners in the Middle East, that is focused on destroying ISIS and radical Islamic terrorism. (Applause)

We will extend the hand of friendship to any nation that will work with us in good faith on this vital mission. And we want this mission to be accomplished quickly. At the same time, we will change our immigration screening procedures to help keep terrorists and extremists out of our country. (Applause)

We have enough problems. Our country has enough problems. We don't need that one. And that includes stopping the influx of Syrian refugees. Incredibly, my opponent, Hillary Clinton, wants a 550% increase in refugees from that region. Hard to believe. I, on the other hand, want to build a safe zone overseas and use the money saved to invest in
America. We do not want to let anyone in our country who doesn't support our values and who is not capable of loving our people. (Applause)

It is time to create a new American future for you, your children, and all American children yet to come. In this future, we will have an honest government that includes an honest State Department, not pay-for-play. (Applause)

She probably didn't mention that to you yesterday. Government access and favors will no longer be for sale, and important email records will no longer be deleted and digitally altered, which is something they just found out two days ago, bleached. Bleached. Expensive process. Why? Why? 33,000 e-mails bleached through a very expensive process. You ask yourself: What's going on? We will also have an efficient and responsible federal budget. No more waste, no more throwing away taxpayer dollars. Once more, we will have a government of, by and for the people. (Applause)

It will be an inclusive society, one that offers hope and opportunity to every part of this country, including our inner cities. We will ensure that every child in this land, including African American and Hispanic children, are put on the American ladder of success: Meaning a great education and a great job, which they are not getting now. (Applause)

We will follow the noble example of our military men and women, working selflessly across all different races and incomes and backgrounds, to achieve unity and accomplish amazing things. You are amazing people. Just in case you didn't know that. Okay? Amazing people.

Ladies and gentlemen of The American Legion, I ask today for the honor of your vote. Working in unison, we can deliver the real American change our country so desperately needs. We will make America strong again. We will make America proud again. We will make America safe again. We will make America great again. Thank you very much and God bless you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause)

... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

Special Presentations

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and gentlemen, this is probably going to be the absolute toughest part of this three-day convention. It's being able to try to convey in some small way that the sacrifices of your family makes when you go and become the national commander. I'd like to have my wife, Donna, join me. (Applause)

Donna and I have known each other for quite a while. We dated in high school. We dated throughout four years. I'm one of the few West Point graduates that can say they went into the academy with the same girlfriend they came out of; they married that girlfriend two weeks after graduation and are still married to that woman, who has done incredible things. (Cheers and applause)

We have two grown children. Michelle, who is a real estate agent in Atlanta. She has two children, Heather and Daniel. I have another daughter who lives in Griffin, Georgia, who works for U-Haul Corporation. She has two daughters, Joanne and Brandon. But what makes Donna very, very special is we have three adopted children. Desiree, who is in the 11th grade; Kathalyn, who is in the eighth grade; and Joseph, who is in the sixth grade. They are proud members of The American Legion family. In my absence, as happens so often with military spouses, she has been the rock that has kept the family together this year. And I thank her for that, and I think The American Legion owes her the gratitude to allow me to do this job this year. Thank you, honey. (Applause)

I have another very special lady, my younger sister, Melinda, and her husband Bruce, a U.S. Army veteran. And, yes, they are American Legion Family members. Melinda and I grew up together. It was such an experience in a loving home, and, Melinda, I will tell you that if Mom and Dad could have been here today, I think they both would be very proud of you and very proud of me that we still have the values that we learned growing
up. Thank you, Melinda. And thank you, Bruce, for being a great, great brother-in-law. (Applause)

You know, you don't become the national commander on your own. It takes a team. And I had a great, great campaign team. I had two campaign chairmen. One became my aide, Mr. Dewey Moss. And anyone who has known Dewey knows that Dewey is a gentleman. He has been absolutely there in everything that I could ever ask of an aide. And, Dewey, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your friendship. I thank you for your sacrifice for this organization. God bless you. (Applause)

And another campaign manager that got us kicked off and a great, great friend, Mr. Charlie Tucker. For many of you his nickname is Flash because he probably takes a thousand pictures every place he goes. But he has been such a staunch supporter of the campaign and got us organized. Charlie, I thank you so much for your support. (Applause)

The next individual is someone that I think you've seen his products around, and I certainly have seen them over the years, Mr. Tommy Hatton, who has done a great job with his photographs and all his campaign material. And, Tommy, I thank you for your friendship and I thank you for all that you've done for not only me but for the Department of Georgia. I want to thank all the members of the campaign team. If you worked on the campaign team from Georgia, I want you to please stand. Please give them a round of applause on my behalf. Thank you. (Applause)

I want to thank my department leadership, our NECman, Charlie Wessinger; Alternate Phil Youngblood; and Department Adjutant Charlie Knox for their support over the years, not just the last year or the last three years. It is a great, great experience to try to promote a national commander, especially one that doesn't have much talent. But somehow they found the good in me, and I appreciate all that they've done. And let's give them a big round of applause on my behalf. Thank you. (Applause)

Lastly I'd like to thank my fellow past department commanders. I don't know how many of them are over there. When you get all these lights, you can't see. If I said their names, I'd probably forget one and they'd be angry at me. So I won't do that. But I thank the past department commanders for our comradeship and for looking out for The American Legion and the veterans of Georgia.

But lastly I want to thank all of you, all of you American Legion Family members that this year has showed Dewey and I such hospitality. You have made me proud when we announced that over $8 million were raised. It is a testimony to your sacrifice, your dedication to helping veterans and helping your community. God bless all of you and thank you for giving me the opportunity to be your national commander. (Applause)

At this time I would like to ask my national vice commanders to please come forward. All of my vice commanders have represented me well during the past 12 months. I so appreciate their devotion and sacrifice for this great organization. And as a token of my appreciation, I would like to present each of you with a gift. Let's give them a big round of applause. (Applause)

At this time I call on Mr. George Cushing.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CUSHING: Commander, we had a nice gift all wrapped up for you this morning. The security people wanted to see what was inside the box. So they made me open it up and so forth. But inside the box is a certificate for you to play golf at your home course in Douglasville for a whole year on us.

But there's a story that goes with this. We got ahold of Callaway. And you've been on the road, and you're probably going to be a little rusty when you go out for your first game or two. So we asked Callaway if they would design a ball that removes all the hooks, all the slices, and will not go into the water. (Laughter)

Unfortunately, going through security, these were projectiles. So they told me to put them in the trash can when we came in. So these beautiful balls are out in the trash can. So when I leave here, I'll go down in the dumpster and see if we can find them. (Laughter)
But, again, on behalf of all of us, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve with you. And you've done us all proud, sir, and we appreciate it.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, George, and thank all of you. I now call on the national historian, the sergeant-at-arms, the chaplain, and my aide, Dewey Moss, to come forward. Gentlemen, I salute you for your service. Each of you has done remarkable things this year on behalf of this great organization. There's nothing that I could give you that would show the appreciation, but please accept these gifts as a small token of the appreciation that I have for each and every one of you. Let's give them all a big round of applause. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER’S AIDE DEWEY MOSS: Thank you, commander. We walked a lot of miles. We've been into more airports than I can care to remember. But on behalf of your historian, your sergeant-at-arms, your chaplain, and myself, we want to express our appreciation to you. It's been an honor to serve with you and to be part of your team. And to go along with the gift that you just received, the certificate to play golf, I think we have something else for you that might help your golf game. We've noticed that your game has been slipping and we thought this new set of golf clubs might just help.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: You know, the bad thing is two of these four individuals have seen me play. And what he just said, my golf game is slipping, it isn't slipped, it's already gone. But we're going to try to get that corrected. Thank you all so very, very much. And 50 more dollars for the pro shop so when I lose those balls that they lost out there, I can buy some more. (Laughter and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Next we will have a few words from our national adjutant, Dan Wheeler.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, with your permission, I would like to call on the national judge advocate, the national treasurer, and your two executive directors to join me for our next presentation.

Ladies and gentlemen, this national commander has been the epitome of energetic and positive leadership. The man is always smiling, always positive and always up for the next task. If you have ever seen him give a media interview, it's like watching a head cheerleader. He is so animated. He is so proud of The American Legion, and it shows in everything he does. And, Mr. Commander, I want to tell you we're proud of you. We're proud to have had the privilege to serve with you.

His message of walking for those who marched for us has hit a chord with communities across the country. It's gotten people who go to the Legion post regularly but hardly ever advertise their post or what The American Legion does out on the streets, finding out that people are receptive to hearing about The American Legion and receptive to joining The American Legion.

Those walks have brought needed attention to our organization and all we do for veterans, our military and our young people. I'll have to tell you when he first told me that the focus of his commandership was going to be he was going to go to neighborhoods and walk, I wasn't the most enthusiastic responder to it. But I'll tell you, I was dead wrong. Everyone loved it, and I think we'll continue doing it. So you've started a great tradition in The American Legion. (Applause)

He had a very successful year, but there is a downside to that. The national commander has sacrificed a lot of family time in his service to us over the last year. As a result, this gift is one that will likely be very popular with his wife and his children, but first the executive directors and I must change into the appropriate attire. I know you don't think this is a new look for me. (Laughter)

Are you ready? Get up to the microphone.

ALL: (Singing) D-a-l-e B-a-r-n-e-t-t. Dale Barnett, Dale Barnett. Dewey Moss. Dewey Moss. Forever will we hold his banner high. Okay, you get the point. (Laughter)

Commander, open the box. You will note that Mickey and Minnie are holding something in their hands. It appears to be $1,500 in gift cards for Walt Disney World Resort
to be used by you and your family at your convenience. Thank you, commander, for a great year. (Applause)

This is your opportunity to lead another Awareness Walk down Main Street U.S.A. in the Magic Kingdom. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we've enjoyed the privilege of enjoying your company during this year. Thank you, sir. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Dan, and I'll tell you what: Don't quit your day job, okay? That was our leadership of The American Legion. My, oh my, are we in trouble. (Laughter)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Lane assumed the Chair.

Presentation: Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander
Robert S. Turner, Georgia, Past National Commander (Colors)
Daniel M. Dellinger, Virginia, Past National Commander (Plaque)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: After serving this past year as national vice commander, I am honored to represent all members of The American Legion in presiding over the next order of business. This is the time when we present to National Commander Dale Barnett, the Colors of his year in office and a plaque. At this time I call on Past National Commander Robert S. Turner of Georgia to present the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER TURNER: Will the delegates to this Convention please rise. I ask for the National Champion Color Guard from Post 472, the Department of Texas, to bring the Colors of the national commander to center stage. Hand salute!

... At this time, the delegation stood and rendered a salute to the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER TURNER: Two! Commander, if you'll join me. Commander Barnett, last year I watched with pride as you were elected to lead our organization. As a career military officer, you lived in many places, but it was through the Georgia American Legion that you first gained notice as a difference-maker for veterans. You did make a difference. Your Awareness Walks brought attention to the wonderful programs and services offered by The American Legion. Your enthusiastic approach to helping others made you not only an outstanding national commander but a great head cheerleader as well. You brought energy and pride to your distinguished office. From West Point, New York, to East Point, Georgia, excellence has been your hallmark. As you join me as a fellow past national commander from the Peach State, let these Colors remind you of the class and dignity that you brought to your office.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Color Guard, retire my Colors. Hand Salute!

... At this time, the delegation stood and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Two! Please be seated. I've got a script here, but I'm not going to use it, because, I've got to tell you, Bob Turner is the reason I'm standing here. I've said this many times to several groups. Sometimes people see something in you, you don't see in yourself. And I can remember shortly after retiring from the United States Army, Bob Turner says: You're going to be on the Boys State staff. Not only was I glad he asked, because of my previous experience as a Boys State delegate in 1969 in Indiana, but little did I know the friendship that would ensue from just asking me to be a part of the Boys State staff. Bob has been my mentor. He's been my advisor. He's been a friend. He's been a confidante. They don't come any better than Bob Turner. And, Bob, I love you and Betty. And thank you for your years of dedicated service to The American Legion and to the Department of Georgia. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER LANE: I now call on Past National Commander Daniel Dellinger of Virginia to present the plaque to our outgoing national commander.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER DELLINGER: Commander, will you please join me. When you, commander, spoke of duty, honor, country last year in Baltimore, words that guided both your military and civilian careers, we knew then it was going to be an outstanding year. And as we followed you in the yellow Walk shirts across the country and
around the world, we witnessed a great leader, a man who personified that motto. You have lived up to and exceeded our expectations just as you have excelled all of your life.

Therefore, I am happy to present you with a plaque which attests to your election of the high office of national commander of The American Legion for the year 2015-2016. It is given in appreciation of your dedicated leadership and in recognition of your devoted service to God and country and in token of the high esteem of your fellow Legionnaires. It is presented this first day of September before the delegates assembled at the National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. Congratulations, Commander Barnett. (Applause)

...National Commander Barnett resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I want to thank Past National Commander Dellinger. He's the one that led us through a very difficult period of time when he stood up for us in the VA scandal of 2014. I saw his leadership then. I saw what you could be when you stand and make a controversial decision, but you do it for the right reasons when you stand up for veterans and you stand up for your needs.

This year has been quite an adventure for me: Over a half million air miles, all 50 states, ten foreign countries. I've been in 68 distinct different airports, and, as you know, nearly every one of the flights went through Atlanta, whether I stayed there or not. But I survived. Even though Dewey and I were involved in two traffic accidents. I can't tell you how many times we were pulled over by the police. You know, Legionnaires aren't always the best drivers. And I've talked to Adjutant Wheeler, and perhaps we should add a defensive driving class to our Legion College. (Laughter and applause)

But seriously, this year has been a wonderful experience for me and my family. This is an organization that keeps giving to others, and it certainly has given much to me. I have thanked a lot of people, and I know I've missed some. My apologies, because I would be here for hours, and you want to go home, just like I want to go home. But I know as we head toward our centennial celebration, I think back to something that I wrote in 1970 on an application to my U.S. Congressman for an appointment to West Point. The words were very simple but very meaningful: Tomorrow's future is not built on yesterday's accomplishments. And I know that the great things that this organization has done we are all proud of, but I also have no doubt that our best days are ahead of us. Again, thank you for who you are and thank you for what you do. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Special Order of Business: Election of National Officers

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Now, I know there's at least one delegation here that's been waiting for this moment for quite a while in anticipation, and we've come to a special order of business, the election of national officers. National Judge Advocate Philip Onderdonk will read the rules of convention governing the nomination and election of officers.

NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE ONDERDONK: The Rules For Election of National Officers.

Rule 17: Prior to the Election of National Officers, the National Commander shall appoint, subject to approval of the convention, a Judge of Election and such number of Tellers as he deems necessary, provided that the total tellers so appointed shall be an odd number. In a contested election, each candidate going to the ballot shall be entitled to one Teller of his choice.

Rule 18: Nominations for National Officers shall be from the floor on roll call of the departments alphabetically arranged. Each department may present as many candidates as it chooses.

Rule 19: Nominating speeches for National Officers shall be limited to five minutes each. Not more than two seconding speeches shall be made for any candidate, and said speeches shall be limited to three minutes.
Rule 20: When more than two candidates are nominated for any office, balloting shall continue until one candidate receives a majority of the votes of the convention, except in the election of National Vice Commanders.

Rule 21: In a contested election for National Vice Commanders, balloting shall continue until (a) majorities and (b) pluralities are established for one or more candidates under the following provisions:

If, on any ballot taken, less than five candidates receive the necessary majority to elect, the candidate or candidates receiving a majority vote shall be declared elected and a new ballot shall be taken for the remaining number of places to be filled, the candidate receiving the lowest number of votes on the preceding ballot shall be disqualified; except should two candidates remain to fill one place, a new ballot shall be taken.

Rule 22: The convention will nominate and elect a National Commander, and five National Vice Commanders, in this sequence.

Rule 23: At the conclusion of balloting on National Vice Commanders, each Department Delegation Chairman shall deliver a written ballot to the Tellers. Such ballots shall be in the hands of the Tellers before communication is made to the National Commander for announcement of the results.

Mr. Commander, that completes the reading of the rules for Election of National Officers.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Phil. As chairman of this convention, I now appoint as judge of the election, Jared R. Dyer, adjutant of the Department of Oregon. And as tellers of the election, David A. Kurtz, adjutant, Department of Wisconsin; Dale Chapman, adjutant, Department of Virginia; and W. Frank Stancil, adjutant, Department of North Carolina. Will the judges and tellers of the election please come forward. National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler will now call the roll of the departments. The purpose of the roll call is to receive nominations for national commander of The American Legion.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN JEFFRIES (AL): Mr. Commander, Jim Jeffries, chairman of the delegation from Alabama. Mr. Commander, Alabama yields to Oregon.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN JONES (OR): Mr. Commander, Michael Jones, chairman of the delegation from Oregon. Mr. Commander, I request that the chair recognize Cori Romeo for the purposes of a nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes Cori Romeo of the Department of Oregon for the purposes of a nomination speech.

DELEGATE ROMEO (OR): Commander Barnett, national officers, distinguished guests and my fellow Legionnaires, my name is Cori Romeo. I'm a proud Air Force veteran and a delegate to this convention from Alexander Harper Post 115 of Dayville, Oregon. I'm a proud Air Force veteran and a delegate to this convention from Alexander Harper Post 115 of Dayville, Oregon.

Many of you haven't had an opportunity to meet Charles E. Schmidt. Today I wanted to get you acquainted with him as best I can. Most of you know him as Charlie or Charles or that fella from Oregon. But my sister and I, we like to call him Dad.

Long before we were decorating his hair with our colorful barrettes during his wonderful Dad makeovers, Charlie was accustomed to a much different lifestyle. His story began in rural Missouri in a farming community. As a young boy, he learned the value of hard work, commitment, values, ethical behavior, sacrifice, honesty and service to others.

Life on the farm shaped him into the man and the leader we see before us today. Dad used to tell me his family could not afford a college education. He had never heard of the Air Force Academy, so enlisting was the next step on his long journey of service.

Along with opportunities of education, a skilled trade and steady pay, I remember my father fondly re-telling one of the greatest bonuses of enlistment. You see, my dad was one of six children, and five of them were boys. So you can imagine what it was like at the dinner table. Probably a lot like basic training when we were all scarfing down our vittles hastily, worried we weren't going to get any more.
But unlike basic training, in his household, when the food was gone, it was gone. And the delight is still apparent in his voice when he speaks about the unheard-of abundance of milk and three squares every day. Dad, I don't know how to break this to you, but milk has been traded in for sports drinks now.

It seems milk does do the body good. With a fresh glass of milk in his hand, my dad began a career that would span 27 ½ years of his life, serving as an airman, NCO and officer. And like many Legionnaires, Charlie's membership in this organization did not begin immediately upon entering in the Armed Forces, but much further down the road.

In 1984, while on leave, his older brother and my late Uncle Alfred, who happened to be commander of Story-Hardin Post 164 in Craig, Missouri, advised him to join The American Legion, and he explained all military members and veterans alike greatly benefit from its services and support. Something tells me that Uncle Alfred could have used some big brother persuasion and just ordered or commanded him to join, but that was not his style. After a little persistence and patience, Alfred brought his younger brother onto the Post 164 roster.

My late uncle was a very wise man. He knew The American Legion would greatly benefit from Charlie's leadership, as Charlie would benefit from The American Legion. If only Alfred could see the product of his efforts. His little brother, a now Paid-Up-For-Life member, has continued to serve The American Legion for the past 32 years. He's been holding more positions than I have time to cover this evening.

After his retirement from the Air Force, my parents moved from Denver to Burns, Oregon, and Dad transferred to Post 63 of Harney County, Oregon. He served numerous years as post adjutant, post activities chairman, membership chairman and continued serving as post commander. Charlie was elected to serve as the District 10 commander, a position he has held for four years. He also served as the district adjutant and finance officer and was instrumental in revitalizing the district and raising American Legion awareness in Eastern Oregon. In 2003 Charlie was elected the department vice commander and in 2004 was elected department commander where he worked tirelessly to enhance and champion organization, participation, accountability and productivity throughout the department and state.

I know my dad to be a natural leader. So it was no surprise in 2005 when he was elected as Oregon's National Executive Committeeman, a position he holds to current day. Everyone in this room has benefited from his service, dedication or leadership in some way. But make no mistake, my father is a passionate leader that will never rest as long as there is a veteran in need.

Lest anyone think my father is not up to the task, I have firsthand knowledge how he handled traveling the Alps with two bickering little girls in the back seat of his car. And upon reflection, Dad must have been tuning us out, reminiscing of those Malheur days. For those not familiar with that that is, he used to work underground at the Strategic Air Command facility in Omaha, Nebraska. It must have been his secret to all our family road trips throughout Europe.

If you've had the privilege of meeting my father, or perhaps you already do know him, then you will know this: Charlie is a true believer in our American Legion Family, and he's dedicated to its purpose. My father's commitment is unquestionable, his patriotism unwavering and loyalty enduring.

Dad's service to help veterans does not stop with him, however. My mother, Linda, has served seven years as president of Oregon's District 10 Auxiliary. My sister, Andria, is also a member of the Auxiliary. And her husband, Pete, an Air Force veteran and fellow Legionnaire. My husband, Tony, serves active duty as a senior master sergeant in the Air Force and is an adjutant to Post 24 in Perry, Georgia.

Charlie and Linda's five grandsons are all members of the Sons of the American Legion, and their granddaughter is in the Auxiliary. My nephew, Alex, has nearly completed Air Force basic training, and my oldest has designs on joining the Air Force
upon graduating high school. So you could say it's in our blood. Dad, you think we're taking "carry the legacy forward" a little too literally?

Joking aside, my father is a creature of tradition. And as new generations are brought into the fold, it is up to the older generations to pass on the stick, as us airmen like to say. Charlie has embraced the old and the new alike. It is his desire to educate and foster all veterans that are joining the ranks every day and to stress their importance as an active member and what it means to be called a Legionnaire.

I myself once believed that participation in membership in The American Legion Family was not necessary. I was young. I didn't think we needed any help. I had everything I needed. So why would I join The American Legion? But aren't we foolish in our 20s? As Uncle Alfred explained it to Dad, my dad shed some light on it for me. His story made perfect sense, and I've witnessed the light bulb flicker on in several veterans as he explains it to them. As each individual he touches begins to realize how important he or she is to The American Legion, and The American Legion to them, I feel great inspiration. In no way is this scene new for me. Have you ever spoken to someone grounded in their beliefs with unquenchable passion for their purpose? After all, they have experienced firsthand the stories out of the book of hard knocks.

I certainly had it better than my father. However, as with any youngster, I experienced my share of trials and tribulations along the way. One thing has remained constant that I will always remember: In Dad's eyes, you can achieve great feats regardless what of obstacles lie in one's path, but you have to be willing to work for it. If there was ever a moment, and there were several, that I questioned my abilities, he always asked me why. Why can't you do that? You're just as capable as the next person, as long as you're willing to dedicate yourself to the vision at hand. Dad should know. He was never a stranger to hard work and tenacity.

Only a few people in this room know this, but while serving active duty as an NCO, Dad was working on his bachelor's degree, and he was also working nights in the shoe department at JC Penney. He did all this so he could apply to officer training school, and it was accomplished while also raising a young family. So, again, dedication and commitment come to mind.

It's this deeply rooted belief of earning one's accomplishments regardless of obstacles and inspiring people in the process is what makes Charlie a great leader. He inspires people to be something more. If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. This was what our sixth president of the United States of America, John Quincy Adams, believed in, and I know my father believes in it, too. Therefore, it is with great pride and honor, as a proud member of The American Legion, that I nominate my father, Charles E. Schmidt, for the high office of national commander of The American Legion. Thank you and God bless you all. (Applause)

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CARR (AK): Mr. Commander, Elezandria Carr, chairman of the delegation from Alaska. Mr. Commander, Alaska yields to Texas.

DELEGATION SECRETARY WEST (TX): Mr. Commander, Bill West, secretary of the delegation from Texas. Mr. Commander, I request that the chair recognize Paul Dillard for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes Paul Dillard.

DELEGATE DILLARD (TX): National Commander Barnett, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, guests and delegates to the 98th National Convention of The American Legion, I come before you today for the purpose of seconding the nomination of a true Legionnaire and a friend to all in the name of Charles E. Schmidt.

Charles established his eligibility in The American Legion when he enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1965 and served on active duty until his retirement in 1993. During his service in the United States Air Force, Charles served in the enlisted ranks as well as an officer. Charles served in enlisted ranks as an administrative clerk to then
become a distinguished graduate from the Air Force Officer Training School, earning a commission and assignments to executive support officer positions at major headquarters. His assignments took him to Oregon, California, Montana, Nebraska, England, Germany, the Philippines, and Vietnam. As an active-duty servicemember, Charles joined The American Legion in Craig, Missouri, in 1984, and after his military retirement, he transferred to Burns Post 63 in Burns, Oregon.

As a duly elected delegate from the Department of Texas, it is indeed an honor for me to second the nomination of Charles E. Schmidt, the Department of Oregon, for the high office of national commander of The American Legion for the year 2016-2017 to carry the legacy forward. (Applause)

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN ELLIS (AZ): Mr. Commander, Bill Ellis, chairman of the delegation from Arizona. Mr. Commander, Arizona yields to Wisconsin.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RYNES (WI): Mr. Commander, Ken Rynes, chairman of the delegation from Wisconsin. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair recognize Reverend Daniel Seehafer for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes Daniel Seehafer from the Department of Wisconsin.

DELEGATE SEEHAFER (WI): National Commander Barnett, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, delegates, members of The American Legion Family, and guests: We have come to an important part of our convention, to elect a new commander, yes, a fellow Legionnaire, who will have the distinct privilege and honor to not only represent us, but to lead our family throughout the next year under the theme "Carry the Legacy Forward."

You see, family, this is more than just another catchy phrase that's embroidered on the sleeve of our new membership shirts. It's truly a heartfelt statement of what our candidate for national commander personally experienced throughout his 33 years of continued membership.

That's why I wholeheartedly believe God enabled Charlie to accept his brother's invitation for membership that one day, because He had a master plan for Charlie and for our beloved organization, a plan that would first bring a leader with determination, commitment, and loyalty into Harney County, Post 63, his home post, so that its legacy would continue. With his first blue cap position as adjutant and later as commander, Charlie would be vital in resurrecting a post that didn't even have a flag to salute.

Going forward from their first yard sale so that Old Glory could be purchased, they would become then a powerful family with the ability, yes, the ability, to send seven boys to their Boys State program. A post that was bankrupt in so many ways would now become rich with a renewed purpose and vision.

Moving forward with boots on the ground, Charlie would also travel numerous miles, making personal contacts, establishing and re-establishing those relationships and personally giving his time, talents, and treasure so that a legacy could be brought forward into those future generations, as Oregon's 10th District would achieve year after year Gold Status in membership.

Therefore, Charlie was brought into our midst for a God-driven purpose: To carry our legacy forward and to carry it forward this time as our next national commander of the largest and greatest wartime veterans organization in the world, The American Legion. So it is with great pleasure and enthusiasm as a duly elected delegate from the Department of Wisconsin, I second the nomination of Charles E. Schmidt for the high office of national commander. (Cheers and applause)

... At this time, a demonstration of support ensued during which the song "Coming Home (Oregon)" was played. (Applause)
NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The convention will come back to order. But if you left your heart in Oregon, that's okay. At this time, I call on National Adjutant Dan Wheeler for purposes of continuation of the roll call.

DELEGATE ERDMAN (AR): Mary Erdman, NEC, from the Department of Arkansas, home of The American Legion World Series Baseball Champion team. We cast all 22 votes for Charles Schmidt.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CA): Mr. Chairman, Department of California is pleased to cast all its votes for our neighbor to the north, Charles E. Schmidt, from the Department of Oregon.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CO): Colorado, immediate past department commander casts all 31 votes for Charles Schmidt, Oregon.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SPEDALIERE (CT): Mr. Chairman, Paul Spedaliere, delegate chairman for the great state of Connecticut and submarine capital of the world, casts 27 delegates for Charles Schmidt as our next national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN GALLAGHER (DE): Mr. Chairman, James Gallagher, Delaware delegation chairman. Delaware casts all 17 votes for Charles Schmidt for national commander of The American Legion.

DELEGATE CUFFEE (DC): Warren Cuffee, NEC. District of Columbia casts all its votes for Charles Smith.

DELEGATE RAMOS (FL): Jim Ramos, past department commander. All votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATE SHANAHAN (FR): John Shanahan, department commander of the Department of France, the birthplace of The American Legion, is proud to cast all nine votes for Charles Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SIEGFRIED (HI): NEC Marvin Siegfried, delegation chairman, Department of Hawaii of the Aloha State, seconds the nomination of Charles Schmidt for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DERRICK (ID): Ron Derrick, delegation chairman. We are proud to cast all 17 votes for our friend and neighbor in the west, Charles Schmidt.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): The great state of Illinois, the home of Past National Commander John Geiger, Mr. American Legion, seconds the nomination for Charles Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MAY (IN): Indiana, Delegation Chairman James May, seconds the nomination.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN PETERSON (IA): I'm Jim Peterson, delegate chairman of the great state of Iowa, and we cast all 55 votes for Charles E. Schmidt of Oregon.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN VAIL (KS): Mr. Chairman, Ray Vail, delegate chairman of the great Sunflower State of Kansas. We cast all of our votes for Charles Schmidt.

DELEGATE COFFMAN (KY): Randall Coffman, National Executive Committeeman, Department of Kentucky. We proudly second the nomination of Charles E. Schmidt for national commander.

DELEGATE BOURG (LA): Mr. Chairman, Rudy Bourg, department commander for state of Louisiana. We cast 30 votes for Charles E. Schmidt as our national commander.

DELEGATE NARAGON (ME): Ramona Naragon, NEC from Maine, casts all of its votes for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MCCOY (MD): Patricia McCoy, delegation chairman of the state of the birth of our National Anthem casts our 63 votes for Charles E. Schmidt of Oregon.

DELEGATE STARKS (MA): Delegate Ken Starks, department commander, Department of Massachusetts, home of John "Jake" P. Comer and Paul Morin, casts 47 votes for Charles Schmidt for national commander.
DELEGATE WOOD (MX): Mike Wood, Department of Mexico, NEC. We cast all seven votes for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BUDA (MI): Michael Buda, past department commander and delegation chairman. The great state of Michigan casts its 82 votes for Charles E. Schmidt for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN KELLOGG (MN): Jim Kellogg, delegate chairman of Minnesota. We second the nomination.

DELEGATE GOSA (MS): Robert Gosa, NEC. Duly elected delegate to this 98th convention proudly supports and casts 21 votes for Charles Schmidt. Thank you.

DELEGATE SCARBOROUGH (MO): George Scarborough, past department commander of the great state of Missouri, home of the greatest generation and President Harry S. Truman and Past National Commander Joe Frank, seconds the nomination.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN GROSSET (MT): Mr. Chairman, Jim Grosset, delegation chairman from Montana, the Treasure State, home of the big sky with Legion members from the plains of the east, the mountains of the west, and our northern neighbors in Canada, a state with the second largest per capita veterans population in the nation, casts all its votes for our friend and neighbor, Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN REIMERS (NE): Delegate Chairman Mike Reimers casts all votes for Nebraska to Charlie E. Schmidt.

DELEGATE MICHALSKI (NV): Ron Michalski, NEC, Department of Nevada. We cast all our 15 votes for the next national commander, Charles Schmidt. And we are home of the 99th National Convention.

DELEGATE GRAHAM (NH): John Graham, immediate past department commander, the Live Free or Die State, casts all of its votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BABLI (NJ): Mike Babli from the great Garden State of New Jersey, delegation chairman, proudly casts all our unanimous votes for Charles Schmidt.

DELEGATE STERLE (NM): John Sterle, department vice commander from the Land of Enchantment, second the nomination of Charles Schmidt for national commander.

DELEGATE Sampson (NY): John Sampson, commander, Department of New York, casts all of its votes for Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BRIDGES (NC): Donald Bridges, delegate chairman, North Carolina, proud state of the World Series, proudly casts all our votes for Charlie Schmidt.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): The great state of North Dakota casts all ballots for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATE CHAPMAN (OH): Ron Chapman, commander of the Department of Ohio, proudly casts all of its 110 delegates for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BRYANT (OK): Bobby Bryant, delegation chairman of the great state of Oklahoma, casts all votes for our friend Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN OLSEHSKIE (PA): Mr. Adjutant, Carl Olsheskie, delegation chairman from the great state of Pennsylvania, home of Past National Commander Dominic DiFrancesco and Past National Commander Ronald Conley, casts all of our votes for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGAE WADE (PI): Mr. Chairman, Lawrence Wade, Department of Philippines. We cast our seven votes for Charles E. Schmidt, next commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN COLON (PR): Buenos dias. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Pedro Colon, commander and delegation chairman from the Department of Puerto Rico. We cast all of our votes to Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATE WINSTON (RI): Bob Winston, NECman, Department of Rhode Island, casts all our votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN LYSAGHT (SC): Joe Lysaght, delegation chairman. We proudly casts all of our votes, 29, for Charlie Schmidt.
DELEGATION CHAIRMAN HANSON (SD): South Dakota Delegation Chairman Terry Hanson here, birthplace of American Legion Baseball, casts all its votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATE HARPER (TN): Mr. Commander, Nancy Harper from the great state of Tennessee, casts all 34 of its votes for Charlie Schmidt for the next national commander.

DELEGATE STEPHENSON (UT): Mr. Adjutant, Chuck Stephenson, department commander of Utah, home of 50-year National Executive Committeeman William Christoffersen, enthusiastically casts all our 14 delegates for Charles E. Schmidt.

DELEGATE LATOUR (VT): Mr. Chairman, Fred Latour, commander, Department of Vermont, where we produce the sweetest nectar known to mankind, maple syrup, casts all our votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CHAPMAN (VA): Mr. Chairman, Jim Chapman, delegation chairman for the great state of Virginia and our Commonwealth casts all 58 votes for Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATE ELSTON (WA): Commander, Washington State Department Commander Wayne Elston, we cast all of our votes for Charlie Schmidt for national commander.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WV): Chairman, the proud state of West Virginia, Mountaineers are Always Free, cast all of our 25 votes for Charles Schmidt for our national commander. Thank you.

DELEGATE PERSSON (WY): Mr. Chairman, Ken Persson, vice commander, Department of Wyoming, seconds the nomination of Charlie Schmidt.

DELEGATE STREIT-SMITH (GA): Carmen Streit-Smith, Department of Georgia, casts all 56 votes to Charles Schmidt.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, that completes the roll call.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I now recognize from the floor microphone one.

DELEGATE BOCA: Mr. Commander, James Boca, delegate from New Mexico. Mr. Commander, in view of the fact that there is but one candidate for national commander, I move that we suspend the rules of this convention, close nominations, and that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegation strength of this convention and that Charles E. Schmidt be elected national commander by acclamation. I will now make the first motion.

Mr. Commander, I move that we suspend the rules of this convention pertaining to the election of the national commander and the nomination and election of the national vice commanders which rules shall be reinstated at the conclusion of the election for national vice commanders.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: There is a motion before us to suspend the rules of this convention pertaining to the election of the national commander and the nomination and election of national vice commanders, which rules shall be automatically reinstated at the conclusion of the election of national vice commanders. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, this motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor of the motion signify by saying aye. Opposed? Motion carried. I now recognize from the floor microphone two.

DELEGATE CHAPMAN (OH): Mr. Commander, Ron Chapman, a member of American Legion Post 288 in Williamsburg, Ohio, right here in the fabulous 4th District, also the home of Cincinnati, your host city, commander of the Department of Ohio. Mr. Commander, I move that the nominations for the high office of national commander be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion that nominations for the office of national commander be closed. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion to close nominations is non-debatable motion and requires a two-thirds vote.
All those in favor signify by saying aye. All opposed signify by saying nay. Motion carries. I now recognize from the floor microphone one.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN OLSHEFSKIE (PA): Mr. Commander, Carl Olshefskie, delegate from Pennsylvania. Mr. Commander, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of the Convention and that Charles E. Schmidt be elected national commander by acclamation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, there is motion before us that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegation strength of this Convention and Charles E. Schmidt be elected national commander by acclamation. All those in favor of this motion signify by saying aye. Those opposed by saying nay. Hearing none, motion carries. I now call on the national adjutant.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. National Commander, as national adjutant, I cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this Convention for the election of Charles E. Schmidt as the national commander of The American Legion. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair declares Charles E. Schmidt elected national commander of The American Legion! (Cheers and applause)

Will the sergeant-at-arms assist the new national commander of The American Legion to the platform. He will be escorted to the stage by members of his family and the alternate NEC member from the Department of Oregon, Robert Liebenow. The Chair recognizes Past National Commander Tom Bock for the purpose of administering the oath of office to the new national commander of The American Legion. (Applause)

Administering the Oath of Office to the National Commander

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER BOCK: Charles E. Schmidt, Charlie, congratulations on your nomination and election to the high office of national commander of The American Legion. You have been chosen by the delegates of this Convention to lead our organization for the next year. Our expectations are high, but as you have demonstrated by your dedicated commitment to The American Legion and your proven leadership abilities, I have complete confidence in you fulfilling those obligations.

I know that with the support of Linda, your wife, and your family and the loyal members of the Department of Oregon, you will meet those expectations, and we're counting on you to exceed them. The task before you now is to use your proven skills to motivate us to fulfill the programs built upon the four pillars of this great organization. You are guided by the mandates of this Convention, and we pledge to you our full support for this coming year. If you are now prepared to accept these responsibilities, I ask you to raise your right hand and repeat the oath, repeated by those leaders before you.

I, Charles E. Schmidt, do solemnly pledge myself to perform faithfully and impartially the duties of the office of national commander of The American Legion. I further pledge that I will support and defend the Constitution of The United States of America and the National Constitution and By-laws of The American Legion. And I also pledge I do not subscribe to the principles of any organization opposed to our form of government, so help me God. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Ladies and Gentlemen, the 2016-2017 national commander of The American Legion, Charles E. Schmidt, Department of Oregon! ...At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I'm Charles Schmidt, originally from northwest Missouri, but I currently live here in Hines, Oregon, which is in Harney County. Harney County is the largest county in Oregon, 10,000 square miles and a little over 7,000 inhabitants.
I spent 27 1/2 wonderful years in the United States Air Force, and part of those 27 1/2 years, about half was in the enlisted force and the other half was in the Officer Corps.

Well, at that time, the Vietnam War was becoming a great concern to our country, and obviously the draft was, too. And, of course, I intended to go to college, but unfortunately the financial resources weren't there. I figured if I didn't finish college, I would obviously get a notice from Uncle Sam to join the United States Army. So I would much rather follow the footsteps of my big brother and join the United States Air Force. When I came out of basic training, they signed me as a DDA, a direct duty assignment, which meant I did not go to a technical school, and they put me on a mountaintop here in Burns, Oregon, as administrative clerk.

Well, I met my wife right here during my first duty assignment. Being at a radar site, it was a semi-remote assignment in the United States, which it was a pretty bare base. It actually wasn't a base, it was a station. But there were several of us young airmen, and we would go downtown on Saturday nights. It just so happened that they were having a dance at the local armory, and three or four of us went down to the dance. Of course, like most high school dances, it's boys on one side and girls on the other. We walked in and, like, well, we're not in high school no more, so let's step up and ask the ladies to dance. So I asked this young lady to dance, and we've been dancing together for 48 years.

As a result of those wonderful years, why, we've got two wonderful daughters. They were military born and they are part of our Air Force family. The oldest daughter married an airman, and their oldest son is going into the United States Air Force next month. Our youngest daughter joined the Air Force. As a result, she married an Air Force airman. We have together a total of six grandchildren, and all our kids and grandkids belong to The American Legion Family.

To every blue capper: We're all blue cappers. Some of us wear different colored caps, but those caps are just borrowed. Once we take them off, we all revert back to a blue cap. So we're always a blue capper. A blue capper is where the rubber meets the road, and that is down at the post. It's the blue capper is what makes the post successful. Makes it active. Makes it get involved.

We all have a membership card, which makes us a stakeholder. And as a stakeholder, I've never seen a stakeholder that never did like to not have a return on their investment. And that investment happens when we take our niches and put them together and make something good happen, make a program happen.

You know, it's up to each of us to carry The American Legion legacy forward, to grow, be stronger and do more for veterans, for communities, for youth and also the security of our great nation. It's veterans that help make this nation great, and I think it will be veterans that will continue to keep that tradition going. (Applause)

Acceptance Speech: Newly Elected National Commander
Charles E. Schmidt

National Commander Barnett, past national commanders, distinguished guests, fellow Legionnaires, ladies and gentlemen, thank you, Commander Barnett, for that new introduction. My fellow Legionnaires, it is indeed an honor and a privilege to be elected to lead the largest veterans organization in America that has been serving veterans since 1919, our American Legion.

I am deeply humbled to stand before you in the closing hours of our 98th National Convention and accept the honor you have bestowed on me for the coming year, that of national commander. I pledge to each and every one of you in the highest regard that I will hold the trust and confidence you have placed in me while serving with you and serving for you as together we carry The American Legion legacy forward.

Now, to reassure you of your selection that you have just made, my wife and I had a discussion about five years ago when the topic of national commander surfaced, a topic
that included challenges, responsibilities, commitment that comes with the position and also to a family. Having been over the last 50 years or better an Air Force wife and now a Legion wife, her response was: You have been involved in the military and with veterans most of your life. It's in your DNA.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce to you that lady who has always given me sound advice. She has been my friend and my confidant, a wonderful mother and grandmother. She has been the wind beneath my wings ever since we first met in my early Air Force days. As an American Legion Auxiliary member, she proudly serves her unit, district, and department. And I think she has some of that same DNA I do. The love of my life, my wife, Linda. (Applause)

Linda and I are honored to have our two daughters here today. Our oldest daughter, Andria Kalina, and her husband, Peter. They're sitting over here. Stand up and take a bow. All the way from San Antonio, Texas. And our other daughter, Cori Romeo, who you just met, and her husband, Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Tony Romeo. Stand up. All the way from Georgia. As Cori mentioned, our six grandchildren couldn't be here today. Five of them are in school in Georgia and Texas. But grandson Alex, he's carrying this family legacy forward and going to graduate from the United States Air Force basic training on September 9. (Applause)

And I'm honored to have one of my brothers here today all the way from the Department of Missouri, brother Larry. Larry, stand up. Larry served in the United States Marine Corps and is a Vietnam veteran. (Applause)

Our family is a proud American Legion family, and it has been their endless support over the years that has enabled me to fulfill my passion of serving with and giving back to fellow veterans. I cannot thank them enough. Thank you again. There are others that I owe some big thank you's to. Cori, your nomination speech couldn't make any dad more proud of his daughter than he already is. (Applause)

But for this dad, you did. Your words touched my heart. And thanks to Paul Dillard and Daniel Seehafer for their seconding speeches. I suspect we'll be hearing from those two Legionnaires possibly in the future here. Thanks to Past National Commander Tom Bock for administering the oath of office and also Past National Commander Bob Spanogle, who will be presenting my colors a little later. I appreciate the support that you and all the past national commanders have given me over the years. Your mentorship has meant so much to me.

To my Oregon American Legion family, some of them are back over there, and some of them are up here, you believe that a journey to a national commander was long overdue. Today is historic, for your journey to a national commander has become a reality. Oregon has its first ever national commander of The American Legion. Thank you, Oregon, for inviting me along. Your support has been phenomenal, enabling me to visit 49 departments throughout the last 24 months. I couldn't have done it without you, and I appreciate everyone's tireless efforts, including my post, Harney County Post 63, the largest post in the county. Well, it's the only post in the county. Also our Auxiliary Unit 63 who have done so much for me back home. And also to our campaign team, our campaign manager, Kevin Owens, and the entire O-team who got us here today. So today, Oregon, this is your day. Savor it to the fullest, and savor it forever.

There are a couple of people who are unable to be here today that I know they would if they could, but health reasons preclude that. Past National Executive Committeeeman T. Les Galloway has been a friend and a guiding light in my Legion career. From his 70 years of membership in the Legion, he has shared invaluable counsel toward my growth and development as a Legionnaire. I am so blessed to have known T. Les Galloway.

Also Past National Vice Commander Harley Ray, who, as a department vice commander, placed his trust and support in me as a new district commander to revitalize my district. Harley never relinquished his support since.
I would not be here today, seriously, I literally would not be here today if it had not been for a persistent post commander working membership. Little did my brother know what return on his investment would bring when he signed me into the Legion, because that investment that he put in was my first two years of membership dues. I know brother Alfred in Post Everlasting, smiling from ear to ear today, along with brother-in-law Rod and my national commander in 2004-2005, Tom Cadmus. Also Barry Snyder, Oregon's past department adjutant, all who had a profound Legion influence on me. I have been so blessed to have such wonderful support all my life, and that has enabled me to reach this pinnacle today.

Let me take a moment to congratulate National Commander Dale Barnett on a spectacular year, commander. You know, commander, you instilled in us our commitment to duty, honor, and country. You've come to our departments and walked for those who marched for us. Commander, in the coming months, we are going to carry your legacy forward by continuing your Walk for Veterans. Thank you for a great year from all of us. (Applause)

Over 97 years ago, members of the American Expeditionary Forces gathered in Paris, France, to discuss what's going to happen to their fellow soldiers now that World War I had ended. History tells us that that war to end all wars was a brutal war, trench and aerial combat, chemicals, and the introduction of other weapons of war, which left many doughboys physically and mentally harmed. Their discussions led to many questions, which were answered when they met in caucus on March 15 of 1919 in Paris. As a result, the cardinal principles or the founding principles of The American Legion were born; the rehabilitation of all disabled veterans; the care of the dependents of those who have answered the final call; the care of those veterans who are suffering from wounds, disease, and want; education of our children; and service to our community, state, and nation.

Over the years, those cardinal principles evolved into what we now know as the four pillars: defense, veterans, Americanism, and youth. Those cardinal principles, along with the four pillars and the ten enduring phrases in our preamble have defined The American Legion's values and causes. They define who we are, what we do, and for whom we serve. Together they have defined our commitment for 97 and now almost 98 years.

Our founding fathers had a vision for America and its veterans. That vision is still relative today. As long as there are conflicts around the world, our nation must be prepared to defend those vital interests to our nation and our allies with a strong and capable military. Where there are active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel, and, yes, even veterans, there will always be a need for The American Legion.

My fellow Legionnaires, you and I have inherited that vision today. It is our time and responsibility to ensure that that vision is passed on to the next generation of veterans, to ensure those that have borne the battle and their families will be cared for by a grateful nation. Like our founders, my fellow Legionnaires, you and I must leave our footprints on this American Legion. In communities across our nation, it is the Legionnaires that form the inner-strength and core to form the foundation our four pillars stand on, and that's The American Legion post.

As a Legionnaire, each of us holds a membership card from a post as we are a post-oriented organization. Our membership card makes us each a stakeholder in The American Legion, and with that comes a voice and a vote, and also with that comes a responsibility. A responsibility to our individual post, to our fellow Legionnaires, and to our veterans to make something good happen in The American Legion by getting involved. It's unthinkable of a post charter petitioning for cancellation because no one will step up to a leadership or a position of responsibility.

Each of us has a niche or a forte to bring to this great organization, and if we collectively combine all of our special talents and invest them throughout our post, we will strengthen our American Legion and continue to make positive things happen for veterans, for our communities, and for our nation. Our individual participation at every level is vital
to the success of every program and to the sustainment of every post. Simply put, let's attend the post meetings and let's get involved and let's work the programs. Let's be ever mindful that our communities need The American Legion, our veterans need us, and America needs a strong American Legion.

If there was ever a better time to promote Americanism, now is the time. These days we see more disrespect to the flag of our country, in our country. We see violations of the Flag Code with total disrespect for a symbol that has stood for democracy around the world, and legislation has been introduced to protect our flag from desecration, which The American Legion still supports. Legionnaires, let's share our position with the 114th and soon to be the 115th Congress to give them a chance to do something good for America. (Applause)

There's a high school or grade school near almost every post, an excellent place to promote flag history and etiquette by vets in the classroom who can also distribute the booklet "Knowledge in a Nutshell on America" to the schools' libraries. Our personal experience has been that students welcome Legionnaires into their classroom. On patriotic holidays, our posts should be the leader in establishing and promoting observances, which is basically Veterans Day, in our communities and in our schools.

Our organization's stand on immigration is quite clear. There is a correct way and a legal way to become a citizen in the United States of America, and I applaud the post that conducts citizenship classes for legal immigrants to be naturalized citizens and become contributors to our society.

In two months the voting booths will open for elections across our great land, and we've heard both candidates on their positions, ranging from employment to national security, immigration, health care, equal rights, and, of course, veterans. Our organization is nonpartisan, as you know, and our booklet, "Our Pillars, Your Platform," gives our organization's nonpartisan positions and has been distributed to all the political parties. The booklet should be in every post to share with Legionnaires as they encourage citizens to register and exercise their right to vote through our Get Out the Vote program.

Our youth pillar has given America's youth opportunities to develop in good citizens since 1919. It is posts who have made those opportunities available, programs that have groomed presidential candidates, Olympic contenders and champions, and role models from all walks of life. Legionnaires made it happen. Just as they are with the newest and growing program, the Youth Cadet Law Enforcement program. We saw on this stage two days ago the fruits of our labor. Every Legionnaire should feel proud to have seen and heard the caliber of youth that come to our programs.

Yet, our program participation rates could be better. Many students await to learn about our programs and the possible lifelong rewards of participating in Boys State, Oratorical, Boy Scouts, Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, and now the Youth Cadet Law Enforcement program. It's none too soon that our posts start now to work with parents, schools, organizations and other sponsors to increase student participation.

My fellow Legionnaires, while you and I may not be awarded a grant or a scholarship for our efforts like a student participant may receive, our rewards will be seeing students in our communities bettering themselves and their future because The American Legion gave them a chance. America needs a strong citizenry, and The American Legion has the programs to help facilitate that. We just need to do it.

The American Legion's relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs dates back to the late 1920s, early 1930s, when it was known as the Veterans Bureau. The Legion and the VA's relationship has grown into one of mutual respect for one another while working together for health care, education, employment, and benefits for our veterans. There are many challenges, though. The backlog of veterans claims and veterans appeals; the accountability of those who are employed to serve veterans; expansion of gender-specific health care for the rising number of women veterans; an adequate and qualified corps of health-care providers to help reduce that excessive delay to VA health
care; and, as always, a fully funded VA. Make no mistake, my fellow Legionnaires, these and other challenges will not be resolved overnight but requires our continued vigilance by you and I. The VA was created to take care of veterans, and there is no other system like the VA that understands veterans' needs. The VA is a system worth saving, and I look forward working on your behalf with the VA and Secretary McDonald in the coming months in a dialogue of openness and sincerity.

Membership participation is important in our membership programs, and it is the members who just ask that revitalized posts, reconnects with Guards and Reserve units and visits military bases. The American Legion's strength is its membership, and membership enables our posts to work Legion programs within our communities. Our messages must be loud and clear and understood when we advocate to Congress on behalf of veterans, and a strong membership enables us to do that.

Starting right now, Legionnaires, I challenge each and every one of you to sign just one new member up and retain one new member. If you do, you will hear from me. If you sign three new members up, you're going to receive the national commander's pin, which I think looks pretty sharp. Your department can compete for a monetary award within your region by signing up the most new members during the period January 1 through May 31, 2017. I doubt that there is a department that couldn't use additional funds to enhance their membership efforts.

The overall mission of our National Strategic Plan for Sustained Membership Growth is to increase membership and post development by creating a culture of growth. Essential to the principle and training of leadership and development is education. It is paramount that every Legionnaire has knowledge of our programs, activities, goals, and objectives in order to contribute to the success of our great organization. Training is available through The American Legion Extension Institute and also Leadership, Education, and Development programs for departments to add to their training curriculum and their American Legion College. Training our members on the multiple aspects of our organization must be a priority. A greater depth of understanding our members has of The American Legion, the greater value they become to our organization. So quote Benjamin Franklin: "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

Since its inception in 1919, The American Legion remains committed to the health and welfare of our nation's veterans and families. The Temporary Financial Assistance program provides non-repayable grants to children of eligible veterans that helps maintain the basic needs such as shelter, utilities, clothing, food, and medical care when the guardian or parent is unable to provide. The Temporary Financial Assistance program would be unable to continue without the financial support of The American Legion Endowment Fund. The American Legion Endowment Fund also provides financial support for service officers who represent veterans seeking legal assistance and helping with filing their claims for veterans benefits. Training our service officers is vital, vital because of the greater and the substantial number of backlog claims that are existing today.

My project this year is twofold: raising $1 million to supplement temporary financial assistance and raising $1 million for training officer support and education. I know I can count on you because it is our job to take care of our veterans and take care of our families. Touching the lives of veterans and their families is what we do, we, The American Legion. We belong to a great organization that is steeped in history, and in the coming months let's accentuate the positive. We have so many programs and initiatives that have become the benchmark for patriotism, service, and sacrifice.

There are veterans in their communities yet to hear our stories, especially those who ask, "What's The American Legion going to do for me?" From our education and training, our post participation and roles in leadership, we can respond: "I'll tell you all the good things that The American Legion has already done for you."

Good things are happening in our posts in every department every day. Share it throughout your communities through social media and other means. Document those good
things in your Consolidated Post Report. Every post deserves the credit for their programs and accomplishments. Let's settle for nothing less than 100% reporting rate in 2017 for the Consolidated Post Reports. (Applause)

The founding fathers of The American Legion had a vision, a vision that is still relative today that every veteran should be cared for. As stakeholders in The American Legion, you and I have the responsibility to carry that legacy forward, not only in the coming months but into the next 100 years. Our time, Legionnaires, is now. You and I must decide how big of footprints we're going to leave on The American Legion, how big and how deep our footprints. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

My fellow Legionnaires, I am truly honored and humbled and proud to be serving with you in the coming year. Together we will make good things happen in our American Legion, and let's accentuate the positive while we're doing it. Like you, I am proud to be a Legionnaire. Thank you for your service, and may God bless you and may God bless The American Legion and may God bless our United States of America. Thank you. (Applause)

First Lady Presentation

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I would like to call on Mary Ludwig, wife of Past National Commander Daniel Ludwig, for a presentation to Mrs. Schmidt on behalf of all of the past first ladies of The American Legion.

MARY LUDWIG: Linda, it is my pleasure to present this badge to you and welcome you as our newest first lady. Congratulations. (Applause)

LINDA SCHMIDT: Thank you, Mary. (Applause)

Election of National Vice Commanders

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Mary. I now recognize microphone number two.

DELEGATE MAXA (MN): Mr. Commander, Mike Maxa, delegate from Minnesota. Mr. Commander, since the rules of this Convention have been suspended, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor of this convention.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: There is a motion before us that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor. ...Second. Hearing a second. This motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Those opposed by nay. Motion carries. We now entertain nominations for the office of national vice commander from the floor. I now recognize microphone one.

DELEGATE CHAIRMAN RAMOS (FL): Mr. Commander, Jim Ramos, delegate chairman and a delegate from Florida. Mr. Commander, I request you recognize Dennis Boland for the purpose of nomination of the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes Dennis Boland for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

DELEGATE CHAIRMAN BOLAND (FL): Mr. Commander, national officers, past national commanders, Legionnaires and guests, as a delegate to this 98th National Convention, it is indeed an honor to nominate my friend and fellow Legionnaire Paul Martel for the high office of national vice commander for the 2016-2017 year.

Paul earned his eligibility for membership in The American Legion through his service in the United States Army 1st Calvary Division from 1963 to 1966. During his commitment to America, Paul served as a dust-off crew chief on a UH1-Delta helicopter while serving in Vietnam in 1965.
Immediately after his discharge, in 1966, Paul joined The American Legion as a card-carrying member until moving to Florida where he became an active member in the Cline-Pautsch-Kott Post 164 in Boynton Beach. Under tutelage of his mentor, Bob Borovy, a World War II vet, Paul was elected commander of Post 164. Eager to be part of this great organization, Paul continued his education by learning the fundamentals of our four pillars.

In June of 1991, at the Florida Department Convention, he voted his conscience for whom he thought would be the better candidate for department commander. Immediately upon casting his vote, he was told that he would never go anywhere in The American Legion. Well, in 1993 he became the 11th District commander, concluding his year as the Race to the Top winner. He served as an aide to four different department commanders. He also became our Southern Area vice commander of Florida, the department historian, department vice commander, and in 2008 Paul became Florida's department commander. On department level, Paul has also served as a disaster relief chairman, Special Olympics, Time and Place, Blood, Oratorical, and in 2013 Paul became the Department of Florida legislative chairman.

On the national level, Paul has served on the Distinguished Guests Committee, National Security Commission and as National Legislative vice chairman for the Department of Florida. In 2009 Paul served as national sergeant-at-arms under National Commander Clarence Hill. As previously stated, Paul is a Race to the Top district commander, also receiving a National Achievement Award for chartering a new post and received a National Achievement Award for exceeding membership at the district level from the previous year.

Paul was also presented the Governor's Veterans Service Award by Governor Rick Scott. In 2012 the state of Florida elected Paul as chairman of the Florida Veterans Council, and Paul still maintains that position. In 2014, Congressman John Mica appointed Paul to be on his Veterans Advisory Council. Also in 2014, Paul was appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs as a sitting member with voting rights to the Florida Nursing Home Commission.

For a man who would go nowhere, I believe I have given you a small synopsis of Paul's dedication and devotion to our organization and to his fellow members. That is why I am asking for your support and vote to elect Paul Martel as national vice commander for the year 2016-2017. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you, Dennis. I now call on microphone two.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STREIT-SMITH (GA): Mr. Commander, Carmen Streit-Smith, chairman of the delegation from Georgia. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Past National Commander Bob Turner for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander. Thank you.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER TURNER: You know, I heard the motion that said that the nominations for national vice commander be made from the floor. I thought about getting down here, but you couldn't hear me because I couldn't get the microphone to go with me. So I'll stand up and do it from here. In one of his writings, Shakespeare said, and I paraphrase this, that all the world's a stage and in his time every man plays a part.

Georgia has a candidate for national vice commander that has certainly played a part in the history of The American Legion, and Georgia endorses Fae Casper for the office of national vice commander of The American Legion. And as an authorized delegate to this convention, I'm proud and honored to nominate her for this high office.

After graduating from high school, Fae joined the Women's Army Corps serving in several states. She rejoined the Army Reserve in 1974 and was called back to active duty on two other occasions. After leaving the military, Fae joined The American Legion and has been a member of our organization for 34 years. I could spend several hours talking to...
you about the accomplishments of this lady, but let me just highlight a few of her achievements.

At the post level, she's received numerous appointments as well as being elected a junior vice commander, senior vice commander, and post commander. At the district level, the same is true, including district commander. She was selected as Georgia's Fourth District Legionnaire of the year in 1995. Fae held a number of appointed and elected offices at the department level, including being elected to the department commander's position, 2008-2009. She's a graduate of the National Legion College, having been there in 2001.

Many of you know Fae as she served as national historian of our organization in 2001-2002 and has been very active in the Georgia Press Association and also a member of NALPA since 1993. She is the first female to represent the blue cap Legionnaires at the national ANAVICUS board. She's retired from The Weather Channel. She has a family of three daughters and one son, with a son and daughter-in-law currently on duty in Kuwait and a grandson stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Fae Casper lives The American Legion every day of her life, and those of us who know her are excited about the possibility of her serving as our national vice commander. Ladies and gentlemen, as a duly authorized delegate to this convention, I'm happy and proud to place in nomination for the high office of national vice commander, our friend and fellow Legionnaire, Fae Casper. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: At this time I call on microphone one.

DELEGATE CHAIRMAN REIMERS (NE): Mr. Commander, Michael Reimers, chairman of the delegation of Nebraska. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Past National Commander Mike Helm for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The chair recognizes Past National Commander Mike Helm for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER HELM: Mr. Commander, past national commanders, delegates, alternates and guests of this convention, I'm honored to be asked to make this nomination of Doug Boldt from Nebraska.

In October of 1967 Doug enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve in order to honor the service of his soon-to-become father-in-law, Melvin Kenny. Melvin served his country during World War II during the attack on Pearl Harbor and other battles of the Pacific. You know, Doug also was able then, being in the Naval Reserve, to complete his college degree. And best part of all: He got Mary Ann in the deal. Mary Ann and Doug have three adult children and eight grandchildren, and together they are a great American Legion family.

Doug was deployed in March of 1969 to the USS Arlington, AGMR-2, a communication relay ship off the coast of Vietnam. The Arlington was later placed in mothballs and decommissioned. Doug was reordered to the USS Niagara Falls, AFS-3, a fresh-produced supply ship sailing in both blue and brown water. Now, I'm not exactly sure what those letters and numbers stand for after the ship's name, but Doug assured me that you Navy veterans out there would think that was rather important.

Doug was honorably discharged in August of 1973. He became a member of The American Legion in 1976 and has been a member of Bryson-Booker Post 59 in Callaway, Nebraska, for 40 continuous years. Doug has always looked for ways to be involved in The American Legion. On the local level, he served as chaplain, Membership Committee chairman, chairman of the Boys State Committee. And on the department level, Doug serves on the Scholarship Committee, the Children & Youth Committee, and for the last 12 years on the Boys State Committee. He is currently serving as first vice president of Nebraska Cornhusker State Corporation.

During Doug's year as state commander in 2003-2004, he chose as his project Operation School Talk. During his year as commander, Doug, along with veterans from World War II to all wars to the present time, both male and female, went to the classrooms
all across Nebraska where they talked to our youth about their time in the military. During the department convention of 2004, the Americanism Committee adopted Operation School Talk as one of their programs where it continues today.

Doug has always been a mentor for both veterans and non-veterans, young and old, male or female. On the national level, Doug served on the National Security Commission, Law Enforcement and Homeland Security. He has also served on the Public Relations Commission and is vice chairman of the National Legislative Council. Doug was elected alternate National Executive Committeeman in 2004 and National Executive Committeeman in 2008, completing eight years on the National Executive Committee.

Doug always brings a smile to the room and dialogue to a meeting. As a delegate from the great state of Nebraska, it is indeed a great honor for me to place in nomination my good friend, Douglas L. Boldt, for the high office of national vice commander of The American Legion. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I now recognize microphone two.

DELEGATE CHAIRMAN STEVENS (NM): Mr. Commander, David Stevens, chairman of the delegation from New Mexico. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Tony Navarrete for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes Tony Navarrete for the purposes of a nomination for national vice commander.

DELEGATE NAVARRETE (NM): Mr. Commander, national officers, distinguished guests and delegates to our 98th Annual National Convention of The American Legion, it is my distinct honor as a duly elected delegate and delegation secretary to place the name in nomination of Paul Leon Espinoza from the Department of New Mexico for the office of national vice commander.

Paul was born and raised in Albuquerque. He's an Iraqi veteran, having served four years active duty with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division and 18 years with the New Mexico Army National Guard in various units throughout state of New Mexico. Paul retired after 22 years in the military. He's a 12-year member of The American Legion and an honorary life member of Carlisle Bennet Post 13 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he has held various offices at the post and district levels, to include commander.

At the department level, Paul has served as commander from 2013 to 2015; membership chairman, 2015-2016; vice commander, 2011-2013; oratorical chairman, 2009-2012; and is involved in many VSO issues including veteran services throughout the state of New Mexico. At the national level, he has served as a member of the National Security Commission, 2014-2016; Americanism Commission, 2011-2013; and is also a 2011 graduate of The American Legion College and a member of ANAVICUS.

Paul is also retired from the U.S. Postal Service after 20 years and has been on the National Association of Letter Carriers Union for 29 years with 15 years as the union shop steward and five years as area vice president of New Mexico for the Letter Carriers Union. Paul has been married to his wife Cecilia for the past 30 years, and they have two children, a son Paul, Jr., and a daughter, Ashley. They also have two grandchildren who are all members of The American Legion Family. They are all very proud and supportive of his endeavors.

Once again, it is with great honor that the members of The American Legion Family of the Department of New Mexico nominate Paul Leon Espinoza for the high office of national vice commander of The American Legion for the year 2016-2017. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The Chair recognizes microphone one.

DELEGATE CHAIRMAN YERMAS (NY): Mr. Commander, James Yermas, chairman of the delegation of New York. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Richard Keiser for the purpose of nomination for the office of national vice commander.
NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The chair recognizes Richard Keiser for the purposes of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

DELEGATE KEISER (NY): Commander Barnett, members seated at the dais, fellow Legionnaires and guests, good afternoon. My name is Rich Keiser. I'm a past department commander and past National Executive Committeeman from the Department of New York. Also a duly authorized registered delegate to the 98th National Convention here in Cincinnati. At this time, I would like to introduce you to our nominee for national vice commander from the Department of New York, Vincent J. Troiola.

Vincent enlisted in the United States Navy in 1968. He took basic training at the recruit training command in Great Lakes, Illinois. He served aboard the USS Nitro, AE-23, an ammunition supply ship, as a boatswain's mate. He deployed with the 6th Fleet and sailed to the Mediterranean Sea and Guantanamo Bay. After completing active duty in 1971, Jim served his remaining time in inactive reserve and was honorably discharged in 1974.

Jim is semi-retired from Estate Motors Mercedes-Benz in Golden's Bridge, New York, where he worked as service and parts director. He and his wife, Saveria, have been married for 43 years and have two daughters, Laura and Jeanette, and two grandchildren, Alexander and Abigail. Jim is a life member of the Vietnam Veterans of America, the DAV, AMVETS, and also a member of the Sons of The American Legion, ANAVICUS, Rockland County Police Steuben Society, and a charter member of the USS Nitro Association.

Jim has been an honorary life member of the William E. Debevoise Post 1682 in New City, New York. He has served in several positions at the post, county, department and national levels. At the post level, he has served as commander, editor of the post newsletter and has chaired several committees. At the county level, Jim served as adjutant, oratorical chairman, membership chairman, national security chairman, and commander. At the district level, Jim has served as an oratorical chairman, adjutant, and commander. At the department level, Jim is a past membership chairman and department commander.

Jim currently serves the Department of New York as the New York City area chairman of the National Commander's Testimonial Dinner. As chairman of the Department of New York's Centennial Task Force for the Future, he's a member of the faculty of The American Legion College in New York. At the national level, Jim has served on the Membership and Post Activities Committee, and is currently a member of the National Security Commission.

At this time, it's my honor and privilege to place the name of Vincent J. Troiola in nomination for the high honor of national vice commander. Thank you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I now recognize microphone two.

DELEGATE FEUERBACH (IA): Mr. Commander, Bruce Feuerbach, delegate from Iowa. Mr. Commander, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion that nominations for the office of national vice commander be closed. Is there a second?

SECOND.

Hearing a second, the motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Those opposed by nay. Motion carries. The Chair recognizes microphone one.

DELEGATE SMITH (AR): Mr. Commander, Jay W. Smith, delegate from Arkansas. Mr. Commander, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegate strength of this Convention, and that Paul Martel from Florida, Fae Casper from Georgia, Douglas Boldt from Nebraska, Paul Espinoza from New Mexico, and Vincent Troiola from New York be elected national vice commanders by acclamation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: We have a motion that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegation strength of this convention and that Paul Martel of Florida, Fae Casper of Georgia, Douglas L. Boldt of Nebraska, Paul
L. Espinoza of New Mexico, and Vincent J. Troiola of New York be elected national vice commanders by acclamation. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Those opposed by nay. Motion carries. I now call on the national adjutant.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: National Commander, as national adjutant for The American Legion, I cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this convention for Paul Martel, Fae Casper, Douglas L. Boldt, Paul L. Espinoza, and Vincent J. Troiola for the offices of national vice commander of The American Legion 2016-2017.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: I declare Paul Martel, Fae Casper, Douglas L. Boldt, Paul Espinoza, and Vincent J. Troiola for the offices of the national vice commander of The American Legion. Let's give them a big round of applause! (Applause)

At this time I am honored to swear in your newly elected national vice commanders. I know you will uphold the trust that has been placed in you by the comrades who nominated and supported you and convention delegates that elected you. I trust you will fulfill every obligation required of you. I challenge you to familiarize yourselves with the duties of your office and carry them out with the same spirit from which The American Legion was founded.

The welfare, success and integrity of this great organization depends on you as you travel in the departments and throughout this country promoting the mandates of The American Legion as approved by the National Convention and the National Executive Committee. It is your duty to protect the good name of The American Legion and the people of our great nation that you meet as you travel; help them to know the Legion's purposes and policies. Remember the four pillars that motivate us as members to serve this nation.

As you serve, always remember there is no rank, for we all serve as equals. We all are aiming for the same goals, the ideals of justice, freedom, democracy and loyalty. This means you should always employ the cardinal principles of The American Legion to all that we serve. The rehabilitation of all disabled veterans and the care of those who are now suffering from wounds, disease and want, to include the care of their family members, the education of our children, educating citizens on the ideals of true Americanism; maintaining a strong national defense. In your travels representing The American Legion, always practice these four pillars in your promotion of service to the community, state and nation. At this time, please raise your right hand and repeat after me.

...At this time, the national vice commanders were administered the oath.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Congratulations, national vice commanders. You may lower your hands. Let's have a great year. (Applause)

I now call on Past National Commander Robert W. Spanogle of Michigan to present the Colors to our incoming national commander.

Presentation: Colors to Newly Elected National Commander

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER SPANOGLE: Thank you, Mr. Commander. Legionnaires and distinguished guests, please rise for the presentation of our National Colors by the Color Guard of Post 472, of Houston, Texas, to National Commander Charles E. Schmidt. Color guard, present the Colors of the new national commander of The American Legion. Hand Salute.

...At this time the delegation stood and rendered a salute to the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER SPANOGLE: Two! National Commander Schmidt, please join me here at the podium. You stand before this convention having received the unanimous vote of confidence in your ability and leadership to represent not only the Legionnaires, but all American veterans in the coming months. As a veteran, we know that you're up to the challenge. You have served The American Legion in numerous
capacities over many years. You have the experience and talent to lead The American Legion and the Legion Family.

I know, and the delegates know, you are the right man to carry our great organization forward in the coming year. Your theme, "Carry the Legacy Forward," and I also know that our World War I founders, the men and women who founded this organization, who addressed each other as comrades and buddies, and the 275,000 young men and women in the service of our country in uniform, call each other battle buddies.

For each of us, everyone welcomes you to your Colors. The Colors we present to you are a source of inspiration and pride, the Flag of the United States of America, which represents all of our founding documents in a democratic republic, the red, white, and blue, and the crimson flag of The American Legion. National Commander Schmidt, God bless you and our American Legion as you lead us in the coming year. Color Guard, please return the Colors to post. Salute.

... At this time the delegation rendered a salute to the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER SPANOGLUE: Two!

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: This is an exciting time for any National Convention. We have elected a new national commander and look forward to a time of growth and community involvement. This is also a time when The American Legion Auxiliary elects a new president, as this is an important part of our American Legion Family. They are also poised for a bright future.

The woman chosen to lead The American Legion Auxiliary has worked many years for veterans and their families. She served as the organization’s national vice president and has 40 years of membership. Eligible for Auxiliary membership through her late father, R. Garnett Boots, a World War II veteran; her mother, Helen Babb Boots, also a World War II veteran; her husband, Vietnam veteran Dale Davis; and her son, Robert Davis, who served during Desert Storm. She is an accredited VA service officer and a member of Pat Tillman Memorial Unit 53 in Dupont, Washington. Please give a warm American Legion welcome to National President of The American Legion Auxiliary Mary E. Davis. (Applause)

Greetings: Mary E. Davis, National President
The American Legion Auxiliary

Commander, Legionnaires, you've done a wonderful job electing a wonderful Pacific Northwesterner, and I'm very, very pleased. I look forward to working shoulder to shoulder with Charlie this year as we work for the betterment of our Legion Family. So proud to be able to call Charlie, much like you will, my commander. Thank you so much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Thank you so much, Mary.

The man chosen to lead the Sons of The American Legion is a member of Squadron 27 in Apache Junction, Arizona. His eligibility is from his father’s service in Korea and his stepfather’s service in Vietnam. He has served in numerous capacities at the squadron, detachment and national levels. Employed as a journeyman mold maker, he is married to Patti Helen Frain. They have two children and three grandchildren. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome National Commander of the Sons of The American Legion Jeff Frain. (Applause)

Greetings: Jeff Frain, National Commander
Sons of The American Legion

Good afternoon. Welcome, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion. On behalf of 365,000 and still growing Sons of The American Legion, I want to say thank you for your service.
Because of you, we are eligible to be part of this organization, and we take it with honor and pride. I look forward to this next year serving with Charlie. It's going to be an honor. The Sons will carry the legacy forward. We look forward to serving with Mary side by side. Like I said earlier, I'm afraid of your husband, so I won't get too close to you.

Next year I have called a call of action to the Sons of The American Legion. We will help our parent organization grow in membership. I have asked them to sign up three brand-new veterans to help our organization grow. And with that being said, it will help the Sons grow and the Auxiliary grow. We need that. So please help. When the Sons come to you and ask for the use of the post or to help with them doing so, please give them time and your post.

The other challenge we have out there, where is Mr. Dennis Boland? He's somewhere in here. We made a challenge, Dennis. You are going bald, sir. I'm telling you that right now. As an American Legion Family, we want to raise $1 million for the Child Welfare Foundation. The Sons just passed the $7 million mark in donations, and we hopefully, make no mistake or no debate, we will hit eight here in the future. But in Reno, Dennis, you will be bald. Trust me. And like I say, when he likes his hair, he doesn't want to remove it. We're going to remove it.

Again, it's an honor to stand in front of you. I've waited for this for a long time because serving our veterans is a passion of mine, and for me to stand in front of you as your Sons of The American Legion national commander, I am so humbled and so honored to do so. That being said, I would like to stand back and salute all of you. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Joining Commander Frain is National Commander Charles Schmidt and National President Mary Davis. Ladies and gentlemen, National Commander Schmidt, National President Davis, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Frain, our dynamic leadership team for the upcoming year! (Applause)

Unfinished Business

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: An announcement, please. Just a reminder that the Post-Convention NEC meeting will occur in the Convention Center, Rooms 200-205, immediately following adjournment. All the new national officers are to attend. Is there any further business to come before this convention? Hearing none, please rise and uncover as Acting National Chaplain Cash offers the Benediction.

Benediction

Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North Carolina, Acting National Chaplain

As men and women of faith, we depart today knowing He will never leave us nor forsake us. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Psalm 100: Know ye that the Lord is God. It is He who hath made us and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise and be thankful unto Him. For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. Amen.
Retirement of Colors

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Sergeant-at-Arms, please retire the POW/MIA Flag. ... At this time, the POW/MIA flag was retired.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: The flag has been retired. Please recover. The Color Guard will retire the flag of the United States. The delegates will stand and hand salute on my command. Hand Salute!

... At this time the delegation stood and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: Two! Thank you again to our Color Guard. Let's give them one last round of applause. (Applause)

The time is now 1301 hours. I now declare the 98th Annual National Convention of The American Legion adjourned. Sine die. (Applause)

... At 1:01 p.m., the 96th Annual National Convention of The American Legion was adjourned.
The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal Award: Awarded annually to an individual(s) or organization for their outstanding service to the nation and to the programs of The American Legion by nomination by department action or by the National Commander.

RECIPIENT: 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard)

American Legion Baseball Graduate of The Year Award: Presented to the major league baseball player who played American Legion Baseball as a teenager and best exemplifies the principles and purposes of the program in sportsmanship, citizenship, general good conduct, integrity and playing ability.

RECIPIENT: Brian Dozier – Minnesota Twins, Post 49, Tupelo, MS

Bob Feller American Legion Pitching Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player recording the greatest number of strikeouts during the regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Gerald Hein, Post 4, Kennewick, WA (24 strikeouts)

Commissioner of Baseball Trophy: Awarded annually at the Major League World Series to that baseball team which becomes the National Champion as a result of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: Texararkana Post 58, Texarkana, AR

Dr. Irvin L. “Click” Cowger Memorial R.B.I. Award: Awarded annually to The American Legion Baseball player who is credited with the most runs batted in by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Angelo Bortolin, Post 82, San Mateo, CA (16 RBI’s)

Ford C. Frick Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having within its jurisdiction the runner-up team in the National Finals of The American Legion Baseball program.

RECIPIENT: Rowan County Post 342, Salisbury, NC

The Frank N. Belgrano, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department which has rendered the most outstanding service during the year to the program of the Boy Scouts of America.

RECIPIENT: Department of New York

George W. Rulon Baseball Player of the Year: A Plaque is presented to recipient by appropriate official upon conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series. Citation is presented to recipient at a special Hall of Fame ceremony at Cooperstown, NY, the following summer.

RECIPIENT: Will Smith, Post 58, Texarkana, AR

The Howard P. Savage, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having the baseball team which becomes the Champion as a result of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: Texarkana Post 58, Texarkana, AR

Jack Williams Memorial Leadership Award: Awarded annually to the manager and coach of the national championship team, as representative of the adult leadership Jack Williams stressed during his lifetime.
RECIPIENT(s): Texarkana, AR: Team Manager – Dane Peavy; Assistant Coaches – Reid Peavy, Jonathan Boucher, Steve Goodheart, Jonathan Orr

James F. Daniel, Jr. Memorial Sportsmanship Award: Awarded to The American Legion Baseball player participating in the World Series that represents the principle of good sportsmanship emphasized by the program.
RECIPIENT: Logan Vidrine, Texarkana, AR

American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Trophy: Awarded annually in four categories to the top performing Individual and Team in the Sporter and Precision categories competing in the annual USA Shooting National Junior Olympic Air Rifle Championship who are members of clubs and teams affiliated with The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program.
RECIPIENT(s): Precision Team: Minnesota Centershots, Post 102, Anoka, MN – Abigail Buesseler, Elizabeth Ewert, Kamilla Kisch, Samantha Peterson

Precision Individual: Sarah Osborn, Patriot Shooting Club of Virginia, Post 233, Varina, VA

Sporter Team: Freeport HS NJROTC, Post 139, Freeport, IL – Alyssa Hornung, Lindsay Strohacker, Emma Thompson, Elizabeth Woitynek

Sporter Individual: Levi Carlson, National Ford HS MCJROTC, Post 31, Lancaster, SC

The American Legion Baseball “Slugger” Trophy: Plaque is presented to recipient, or designated representative, by appropriate official upon the conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series.
RECIPIENT: Tyler Villaroman, San Mateo, CA (.475 batting average)

Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department within the continental limits in the United States showing the greatest Americanism activity in use of The American Legion School Medal Awards.
RECIPIENT: Department of Colorado

The American Legion Baseball “Big Stick” Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player having the highest total number of bases as determined by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.
RECIPIENT: Zach Luckey, Omaha, NE and Angelo Bortolin, San Mateo, CA (27 total bases each)

Spafford National Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department of The American Legion having within its jurisdiction the winner of the National High School Oratorical Contest.
RECIPIENT: Department of Washington

Francis M. Redington Sportsmanship Award: Awarded annually to the athlete competing in The American Legion Junior Air Rifle National Championship who best exemplifies good sportsmanship and fair play.
RECIPIENT: Jimmy Ellefson (Post 374), Des Moines North MCJROTC, Des Moines, IA
Daniel J. O'Connor Award: Awarded annually to that Department attaining the greatest number of percentage points compiled from information contained in the Consolidated Post Reports and supporting Department narrative. (Originally named the William Randolph Hearst Trophy)

RECIPIENT: Department of Virginia

The American Legion and Scouting “Square Knot” Award: This award is designed to recognize American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion members who are actively involved in the Scouting program. This award is not meant to be a selective or limited award, but one that is available to any American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member who completes the requirements for the award. The Award is meant to recognize dedication and work required by an American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member to assist in furthering the Scouting program in The American Legion.


The American Legion National Education Award: Awarded annually to an individual, group or organization that has promoted the education programs of The American Legion, including the promotion of “Need A Lift?” correspond to the goals of The American Legion or has promoted or advanced education programs at the national level.

RECIPIENT: Sidney T. Ellington, Ph.D.

The American Legion Canadian Friendship Award: Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of authentic veterans' organization in Canada. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans' affairs and in the development and perpetuation of the spirit of international good will and comradeship between the United States and Canada and between their veterans' organization and The American Legion.

RECIPIENT(S): ANAVICUS – Duncan Anderson, John Bartlett, Almer Boyce, Shendon Clupp, John DeWitt, Johanna Emerick, Dennis Kelly, Rene LaQuerre, Sheldon MacDonald, Kevin MacIver, Audrey McInnes, Heather McTavish, David Pich, Ian Sinclair, Lillian Symonds, Beryl Torgasows, Danny Tremplay, Jack Weatherly, Brian Woodley. INDIVIDUAL– None Awarded

Department Award for 100% Post Children & Youth Reporting: Awarded annually to those Departments which achieve 100% of Posts indicating Children & Youth activity on Consolidated Post Reports.

RECIPIENT: Departments of Montana, Rhode Island, Virginia and Wisconsin
National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s): Awarded to an employer in recognition of outstanding achievement in the employment and retraining of veterans.

RECIPIENT(s): Category I
Operation: Job Ready Veterans, Indianapolis, IN
2015

Category II
Stresscon Corporation, Colorado Springs, CO

Winners Category III
New York Shipping Association, Inc., Edison, NJ

Note: The 2016 National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2017 National Convention.

National Employment Service Award Recipient(s): Awarded in three categories: Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) of the Year; Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) of the Year; Employment Service (ES) Office of the Year.

RECIPIENT(s):
LVER of the Year: Nancy Brown, Wausau, WI
2015

DVOP of the Year: Dwight A. Butler, Fayetteville, NC

Winners ES Office of the Year: Fargo Customer Service Office, Fargo, ND

Note: The 2016 National Employment Service Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2017 National Convention.

Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient: The program is a joint project between the National Organization & the AETNA Company, to award those Posts that enhance the lives of disable persons by providing opportunities for their participation in community activities.

RECIPIENT(s):
Outdoor Freedom Network, Broaddus, TX
2015 Winner

Note: The 2016 Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient will not be announced until 2017 National Convention.

National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient: The program provides an Employer of Older Worker Award for a company that consistently hires older workers, especially veterans and serves as an inspirational recognition of a company with a record of support and commitment to the hiring of America’s older workers.

RECIPIENT(s):
First Transit, Houston, TX
2015 Winner

Note: The 2016 National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient will not be announced until 2017 National Convention.

National Department History Contest Awards: Awarded annually at the Fall Meeting of the National Executive Committee to those contestants entered in the National Department History Contest having submitted the One-Year History Narrative or Yearbook of the Department which best meets the standards established for that particular competition.

RECIPIENT(s):
Department of North Carolina (One-Year Narrative History)
Department of Nebraska (One-Year Yearbook History)

National Post History Contest Awards: Awarded annually to those contestants entered in the National Post History Contest deemed by a duly authorized panel of judges to have submitted the One-Year History of the Post which best meets the standards established for the competitions.

RECIPIENT(s):
Pony Express Post 359, St. Joseph, MO (One-Year Narrative History)
Julius L. Shryer Post 430, Durant, IA (One-Year Yearbook History)
**International Amity Award:** Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of an authentic veteran organization established in the territory of any of the nations associated as war-time allies of the United States of America. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans affairs and for service and contributions made in the development of international good will and comradeship between their organization and The American Legion.

**RECIPIENT(s):** None awarded for 2016

**Distinguished Public Service Award:** Awarded annually by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the Commander’s Advisory Committee at the time of the annual Washington Conference. It may be awarded to one or more person(s) of the United States Congress.

**RECIPIENT(s):** Senator Johnny Isakson (GA)

**The Arthur D. Houghton Sons of The American Legion Trophy:** Awarded annually to that Detachment of Sons of The American Legion in each of five membership categories (I – 200-1,000 members; II - 1,001-3,000 members; III - 3,001-6000 members; IV – 6001-12,000 members; V – 12,001 or more), each of said Detachments attaining the greatest percentage of increase over previous year’s membership when compared with all Detachments in its category.

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2015 Winners</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Detachment of Oklahoma</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>Detachment of Wyoming</td>
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<td>III</td>
<td>Detachment of Massachusetts</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Detachment of Minnesota</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>Detachment of Florida</td>
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**General Henri Gouraud Trophy:** Awarded annually to that Department in each of six categories established by the National Membership and Post Activities Committee, each of said Department having been the first in its respective category to attain or exceed its nationally assigned membership quota (effective 1986).

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2015 Recipients</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>None qualified</td>
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<td>II</td>
<td>None qualified</td>
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<td>III</td>
<td>Department of Georgia</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>None qualified</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>None qualified</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>None qualified</td>
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**General John J. Pershing Honor Award:** Awarded annually to that Department having the greatest percentage of its posts receiving the Honor Ribbon for having 100 percent or more, of the post’s previous year’s membership enrolled for the coming year by December 31, and having reported such achievement to National Headquarters by not later than January 31.

**RECIPIENT:** Department of North Dakota

**Henry D. Lindsley Trophy:** Awarded annually to the Department attaining the highest percentage of membership over its preceding year’s membership by March 31.

**RECIPIENT:** None awarded for 2016
The American Legion National Recruiter of the Year: Awarded annually to the individual certified with the highest number of new members recruited from among all of the departments.

RECIPIENT: Patricia Liddell, Department of Georgia

North Carolina Trophy: Awarded annually to the Department, not included among the several state Departments or the Department of the District of Columbia, attaining the highest percentage of membership as of March 31, over its preceding year’s membership.

RECIPIENT: Department of Philippines

O. L. Bodenhamer Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department designated to lead the parade at the time of the ensuing National Convention.

RECIPIENT: Department of Georgia

The American Legion Air Force Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class at the Air Force Academy who demonstrates the highest proficiency in all academic subjects.

RECIPIENT: Cadet Jeffrey R. Herrala

The American Legion Coast Guard Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class of the United States Coast Guard Academy who is considered to have personally excelled in athletics.

RECIPIENT: Ensign Meghan Fornaro

The American Legion Merchant Marine Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the Merchant Marine Academy, enrolled in the Pre-Commissioning Seminar Course, and selected by the Academy Faculty, as achieving the highest grade pertaining to a 1,000-word composition dealing with the subject of National Security.

RECIPIENT: Midshipman Laurel Anne Ryback

The American Legion Military Academy Award: Awarded annually to cadet of the graduating class at the United States Military Academy with the highest standing in Chemistry.

RECIPIENT: Cadet Brian Bui

The American Legion Naval Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the United States Naval Academy who stands highest in those English, History and Government courses taken to complete a Foreign Affairs major.

RECIPIENT: Ensign Ethan Dalton

National Commander’s Blood Donor Awards: Presented to departments in different sized categories for participating in The American Legion’s Blood Donor Program.

RECIPIENT(s):

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Departments with 100,000 or more members:</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Post Participation: Department of California</td>
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<td>Individual Participation: Department of California</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Departments with 70,000 to 99,999 members:</th>
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<td>Post Participation: Department of Minnesota</td>
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<td>Individual Participation: Department of Minnesota</td>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Departments with 40,000 to 69,999 members:</th>
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<td>Post Participation: Department of Maryland</td>
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</table>
Individual Participation: Department of Maryland

Category IV Departments with 25,000 to 39,999 members:
Post Participation: No Submission
Individual Participation: No Submission

Category V Departments with 10,000 to 24,999 members:
Post Participation: Department of Colorado
Individual Participation: Department of Colorado

Category VI Departments with less than 10,000 members:
Post Participation: No Submission
Individual Participation: No Submission

The American Legion National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding law enforcement officer as selected from Department law enforcement officer winners for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Sheriff David J. Mahon, Effingham County Sheriff’s Office, Effingham, Illinois

The American Legion National Firefighter of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding firefighter as selected from Department for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Matt Brown, Lakeland Fire Department, Lakeland, Florida

Paul H. Griffith ROTC Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department giving the highest degree of support to the ROTC program within its jurisdiction, based on criteria drawn up by the National Security Commission.

RECIPIENT(s): Departments of Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, and North Dakota

The American Legion Fourth Estate Award: Awarded to press, radio, TV, or other communications media; to associations of same, to owners, executive heads or staff members; such award to be in recognition of outstanding service to community, state, or nation, which service shall have been in accordance with or the furtherance of established American Legion policies and programs.

Broadcast: Brenden Keefe, WXIA-TV, Atlanta, GA
Online: Ellen Gabler, The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Milwaukee, WI.
The American Legion National Commander’s Public Relations Award: Awarded to an outstanding individual and/or organization for distinguished public service in the field of communications.

RECIPIENT: ESPN

The American Legion Patriot Award: Awarded to an outstanding citizen who has demonstrated a profound and exceptional commitment to military personnel and their families.

RECIPIENT(s): Bernard L. Marie

The American Legion Spirit of Service Award: Awarded annually by the Department of Defense and the six military departments that have identified the most outstanding men and women that have received press coverage in Armed Service News dispatches, the Pentagon Channel, their military base newspapers and their hometown publications.

RECIPIENT(s):
- Army: CPL Bryce T. Wolford
- Navy: PO Levetina S. King
- Marine Corps: SSgt. David M. Jenks
- Coast Guard: PO Geneva L. Cornelius
- Air National Guard: Igor A. Karlov

Arch M. Cantrall Trophy: Awarded annually to that American Legion Band winning first prize in competition with all other American Legion bands during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: American Legion Band of Greater Kansas City, Independence, MO

Glen R. Hillis Trophy: Awarded annually to that Color Guard winning first prize in competition with all other Color Guards during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: Newport Beach Harbor, Post 291, Newport Beach, CA

The Lemuel Bolles Trophy: Awarded annually to that band winning first prize in competition with all other bands during the annual National Convention.

RECIPIENT: American Legion Band of Greater Kansas City, Independence, MO

William F. Lenker National Service Trophy: Awarded annually to that State Department of The American Legion excelling in welfare work for war veterans, providing the membership of that Department shall be no less than 80% of the membership of the preceding year.

RECIPIENT: Department of Wisconsin
The American Legion 97th Annual Report

FOREWORD

The American Legion continued to have a strong year under the leadership of National Commander Dale Barnett, Georgia. Membership was strong with 2.2 million veterans in more than 13,000 posts throughout the nation and overseas. We recorded another year of rewarding service to America, her veterans, and their families.

The American Legion National Headquarters is located in Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition to the Indianapolis facilities, offices are maintained in Washington, DC, to house those organizational functions requiring a close working relationship with the Congress and the appropriate agencies of the federal government. The editorial and advertising staffs of The American Legion Magazine are located at The American Legion's Indianapolis Headquarters.

The National Commander's report is published herein as a part of the National Convention proceedings. Reports of the other national officers, the national commissions, financial statement with accompanying data, and a report of the National President of the American Legion Auxiliary are included.

Throughout the year, the two organizations continued to provide vital leadership to the nation and, through our activities and programs, contributed significantly to the preservation of the American way of life. We are proud of our accomplishments and look forward to the challenges ahead in the coming year.

Daniel S. Wheeler
National Adjutant

EXCERPTS FROM CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

ARTICLE II

Nature

Section 1. The American Legion is a civilian organization; membership therein does not affect nor increase liability for military or police service. Rank does not exist in the Legion; no member shall be addressed by his military or naval title in any convention or meeting of the Legion.

Section 2. The American Legion shall be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment.

ARTICLE III

Organization

Section 1. The American Legion shall be organized in Departments and these in turn in Posts. There shall be one Department in each state, in the District of Columbia, and there may be one Department in each territory and insular possession of the United States. The National Executive Committee may establish Posts in the territorial and insular possessions of the United States and foreign countries, and shall designate the Department under whose jurisdiction they shall function, but this shall in no way affect the status of Departments already established.
ARTICLE IV

Eligibility

Section 1. Any person shall be eligible for membership in The American Legion who was a member of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard or Air Force of the United States and assigned to active duty at some time during any of the following periods: April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918; December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946; June 25, 1950, to January 31, 1955; February 28, 1961, to May 7, 1975; August 24, 1982, to July 31, 1984; December 20, 1989, to January 31, 1990; August 2, 1990 until a date established by Congress for ending the Desert Storm period; all dates inclusive, or who, being a citizen of the United States at the time of his entry therein, served on active duty in the armed forces of any of the governments associated with the United States during any said periods; provided however, that such service shall have been terminated by honorable discharge or honorable separation, or continued honorably after any of said periods; provided, further, that no person shall be entitled to membership who, being in such service during any of said periods, refused on conscientious, political or other grounds to subject himself to military discipline or unqualified service.

Section 2. There shall be no form or class of membership except an active membership, and dues shall be paid annually or for life.

Section 3. No person may be a member at any time of more than one Post.

Section 4. No person, who has been expelled by a Post shall be admitted to membership in another Post, without the consent of the expelling Post except that where such consent has been asked for and denied by such Post, he may then appeal to the Executive Committee of the Department of the expelling Post for permission to be admitted to membership in another Post, and shall be ineligible for membership until such permission is granted.

ARTICLE V

National Convention

Section 1. The legislative body of The American Legion shall be the National Convention, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution and By-Laws.

Section 2. The time and place of the National Conventions shall be determined by the National Executive Committee, which shall have authority to change such time and place for sufficient reasons to it appearing.

Section 3. In the National Convention each Department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the National Treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said Convention and whose registration fees, as fixed by the National Executive Committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid, and to one alternate for each delegate. The delegates shall be chosen not less than 2 weeks before the National Convention at Department Conventions or in any other manner specified by the Department Constitution.

Section 4. Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote. The vote of any registered delegate absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from his Department. Alternates for registered delegates shall have all the privileges of registered delegates except that of voting. A registered delegate is one who has received his credentials after his registration fee has been paid.

Section 5. A quorum shall exist at a National Convention when 60 percent of the Departments are represented as provided above.

Section 6. The National Executive Committee shall provide a Uniform Code of Procedure for the orderly organization and operation of National Conventions with continuing power of revision, and said Code shall be applicable at all National Conventions.
unless it is amended, suspended, or repealed by a majority vote of the total authorized representation at a National Convention.

ARTICLE VI

National Officers

Section 1. The National Convention shall elect a National Commander, and five National Vice Commanders, who shall serve without seniority. No two Vice Commanders shall be chosen from the same Department. No person shall be eligible for re-election to the Office of National Commander or National Vice Commander.

Section 2. Such officers shall serve until the adjournment of the succeeding National Convention following their election and thereafter until their successors are chosen. Vacancies in these offices occurring between National Conventions shall be filled by election by the National Executive Committee, and any member of The American Legion, in good standing, shall be eligible for election to such vacancy. Provided, however, that no Past National Commander or Past National Vice Commander shall be elected to fill any vacancy in these respective offices.

Section 3. The National Executive Committee at its first meeting following the National Convention shall appoint the National Adjutant, National Treasurer, National Judge Advocate, National Chaplain and National Historian, such officers to hold office at the pleasure of the appointing power. All persons having the custody of funds shall give adequate bonds, which shall be approved by the National Executive Committee.

Section 4. All Past National Commanders, while in good standing in their respective Posts, shall be members for life of the National Executive Committee, without vote, and shall also be life delegates to all National Conventions of The American Legion, with vote, to be exercised by them with their respective Departments.

ARTICLE VII

National Executive Committee

Section 1. Between National Conventions, the administrative power shall be vested in the National Executive Committee, which shall be composed of the National Commander, the National Vice-Commanders, and one National Executive Committeeman and one alternate from each Department to be elected as such Department shall determine, the alternate to act only in the absence of the National Executive Committeeman.

Section 2. The term of office of such National Executive Committeeman and alternates shall be two years. The term of office of each National Executive Committeeman and alternate shall commence immediately upon the adjournment of the National Convention next ensuing after their election and shall end at the adjournment of the second next succeeding annual National Convention.

Section 3. Members of the National Executive Committee shall be delegates to the National Convention with vote, which vote shall be exercised with their respective Departments, except that the vote of the National Commander shall be exercised only in his capacity as chairman of the National Convention

Past National Commanders

Keith Kreul, Wisconsin  Bruce Thiesen, California
Clarence M. Bacon, Maryland  William M. Detweiler, Louisiana
John P. Comer, Massachusetts  Daniel A. Ludwig, Minnesota
Hon. H. F. Gierke, North Dakota  Joseph J. Frank, Missouri
Miles S. Epling, West Virginia  Anthony G. Jordan, Maine
Robert S. Turner, Georgia  Butch L. Miller, Virginia
Dominic D. DiFrancesco, Pennsylvania  Hon. Alan G. Lance, Sr., Idaho
Richard J. Santos, Maryland
Ronald F. Conley, Pennsylvania
John A. Brieden, III, Texas
Thomas P. Cadmus, Michigan
Thomas L. Bock, Colorado
Paul A. Morin, Massachusetts
Martin F. 'Marty' Conatser, Illinois
Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
David K. Rehbein, Iowa

Clarence E. Hill, Florida
Jimmie L. Foster, Alaska
Fang A. Wong, New York
Richard M. Pedro, New York
James E. Koutz, Indiana
Daniel M. Dellinger, Virginia
Michael D. Helm, Kansas
Harold D. Barnett, Georgia

National Executive Committeemen

Willis Frazier, Alabama
James E. Pisa, Alaska
Richard W. Perry, Arizona
Mary V. Erdman, Arkansas
Hugh E. Crooks, Jr., California
Francis W. McCurdy, Colorado
D. Joseph Jackson, Connecticut
Kenneth G. Whitman, Delaware
Warren N. Cuffee, D.C.
Dennis R. Boland, Florida
John H. Miller, France
Charles F. Wessinger, Georgia
Marvin R. Siegfried, Hawaii
Thomas E. Mattice, Idaho
Wayne Wagner, Illinois
Paul L. Steward, Indiana
Bruce C. Feuerbach, Iowa
David O. Warnken, Kansas
Randall Coffman, Kentucky
Charles D. Aucoin, Louisiana
Ramona A. Naragon, Maine
Elbert D. White, Maryland
Francis J. MacDonald, Massachusetts
Michael D. Wood, Mexico
Roger H. Webster, Michigan
Marland A. Ronning, Minnesota
Robert E. Gosa, Mississippi
Charles W. Goodin, Missouri

Mervin G. Gunderson, Montana
Jerry Landkamer, Nebraska
Ronald L. Michalski, Nevada
William R. Roy, New Hampshire
Daniel E. McCoile, New Jersey
Felix M. Trujillo, New Mexico
William H. Burnett, New York
Bill G. Richard, North Carolina
Robert L. Krause, North Dakota
Robert J. Kimball, Ohio
Jerry A. Ball, Oklahoma
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon
Robert C. Miller, Jr., Pennsylvania
Herbert J. Scholten, Philippines
Ildefonso Colon, Jr., Puerto Rico
Robert D. Winston, Rhode Island
Cecil F. Hennis, South Carolina
Paul A. Evenson, South Dakota
Gary R. Drennon, Tennessee
James E. Prendergast, Texas
Terry D. Schow, Utah
Francis J. Killay, Vermont
Thomas E. Saunders, Virginia
William R. 'Bob' Wallace, Washington
William W. Kile, West Virginia
Steve Krueger, Wisconsin
William R. Wright, III, Wyoming

Alternate National Executive Committeemen

Hardwick “Rico” Hall, Sr., Alabama
Harold Pawson, Alaska
Judith S. Beischel, Arizona
C. Jacob Greeling, Arkansas
Gary B. Leach, California
James B. Gillis, Colorado
Wayne A. Morgan, Connecticut
John A. Endres, Delaware
Bron R. Mogenis, D.C.
Arthur J. Schwabe, Florida
Ronald E. Moore, France

Phil Youngblood, Georgia
David R. Carlson, Hawaii
Arthur L. Gimpel, Idaho
Bernard A. Stegmueller, Illinois
Jerry L. Jordan, Indiana
Jerry D Sebben, Iowa
Elgin Wahlborg, Kansas
Randall A Fisher, Kentucky
Harold D. Burson, Louisiana
Brenda D. Dearborn, Maine
Michael L. Mooney, Jr., Maryland
William J. Chisholm, Massachusetts
Jerry A. King, Mexico
Thomas G. Brown, Michigan
William C. Barbknecht, Minnesota
John F. Warden, Jr., Nevada
Kenneth B. Maynard, Jr., New Hampshire
Charles K. Robbins, New Jersey
Horacio S. Baca, New Mexico
Edward Bertrand, New York
Jeff W. Joyner, North Carolina
David G. Rice, North Dakota
Dennis E. Clausing, Ohio
William M. Teel, Oklahoma
Robert D. Liebenow, Oregon
Dennis C. Haas, Pennsylvania
Richard L. Perry, Philippines
Luis A. Ayala, Puerto Rico

Steve Sweet, Mississippi
Kenneth J. Goth, Missouri
David A. Driver, Montana
William D. Crosier, Jr., Nebraska
Cory D. Bates, Rhode Island
Gary L. Mitchell, South Carolina
James Huls, South Dakota
Don E. Mathis, Tennessee
C. W. Sparks, Jr., Texas
Richard G. Fisher, Utah
Marlys A. Lemnah, Vermont
Michael F. Mitrione, Virginia
Ken C. Lee, Washington
William E. Burkett, West Virginia
Kenneth J. Rynes, Jr., Wisconsin
Terry E. Miller, Wyoming

EXCERPTS FROM BY-LAWS OF THE
AMERICAN LEGION

ARTICLE I

National Executive Committee
Commission, Committee, and Employees


The commissions shall consist of such number of members of The American Legion as the National Executive Committee may from time to time determine. Appointments to such commissions shall be made by the National Executive Committee upon nomination by the National Commander. The National Executive Committee is empowered to assign duties and responsibilities to all standing commissions and committees and to group standing committees with commissions for the purpose of efficient supervision and coordination of activities.

Section 7. The National Executive Committee shall provide for the appointment and employment of such subordinate officers and employees as may be needed for the administration of the affairs of The American Legion, and prescribe their duties and emoluments.

REPORT OF NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER
George E. Cushing, Arizona

At the 2014 Department of Arizona Annual Convention I was honored to have been endorsed as their candidate for National Vice Commander for the Western Region.

On August 4, 2015 I arrived at National Headquarters in Indianapolis to begin a week of orientation and participate in the national membership workshop along with the four other regional Vice Commanders and the leading candidate for National Commander. During the week we received detailed briefings from each of the Program Directors and toured all the facilities and offices. We received training sessions on protocol, how to do media interviews and talking points of the organization. The following week we traveled to our Washington DC office for additional briefings from the office staff there. We were briefed on the current Legislative points, Veterans Employment and Education, National Security and Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.
On September 3, 2015 at the 97th National Convention I was nominated, elected and installed to the high office of National Vice Commander, Western Region 2015-2016 in Baltimore, Maryland. At the close of convention I attended the National Executive Committee meeting where I was introduced as one of the new National Vice Commanders for the upcoming year; at the end of the meeting we attended a reception of all newly elected officers which was followed by a formal reception for the new National Commander, Dale Barnett of Georgia and the new American Legion Auxiliary President, Sharon Conatser of Illinois. Upon my return home I spent days contacting each District Commander in the Western Region to introduce myself.

My first unofficial visit was to the Department of Oregon on September 15-19 to assist in a revitalization endeavor for Districts 1, 2, 7, 8. I met up with Michele Steinmetz, Assistant Director, Membership Division at the Portland airport; we picked up a rental car and proceeded to the hotel in Milwaukie, Oregon. The next morning we went to Post 80 in Milwaukie where we met19 volunteers made up of Department officers, District Commanders and Vice Commanders, as well as representatives from the Auxiliary and the Sons of the American Legion. We were able to transfer 276 members into local Posts and were able to renew or acquire five members for a total of 281. The Service Officer assisted eight veterans during his two days of participation.

The fall meetings were held in Indianapolis on October 11-16; my wife, Jan and I attended the National Commanders Banquet on October 13, 2015 and the National Executive Committee meeting on October 14-15, 2015 where I made a short presentation of my military career and membership goals.

My first official visit was to the Department of Montana for their Fall Conference in Helena on October 23-25, 2015. I participated in the various meeting and brought greetings and made so initial comments on the first day; the following day I attended the past Commanders breakfast as their guest. I was the key note speaker at the joint banquet that evening. A beautiful memorial service was held on Sunday morning prior to my departure.

I made an unofficial visit to the Department of Arizona during their Fall Conference November 6-8, 2015 and participated in a membership endeavor and an Awareness Walk with National Commander Barnett; during my meeting with Post, District and Area Vice Commanders we discussed the use of tools provided on MyLegion.org website to generate lists to contact members to improve membership performance.

The Department of Washington held a revitalization effort in their District 10 on November 18-21, 2015. Michele Steinmetz, Assistant Director, Membership Division met at Seattle and drove to hotel. The next morning we drove to Post 17 in Centralia where we met with the District Commander Teresa Byran and several volunteers along with Service Officer, Bob Wallace. By the end of the three days we were able to transfer 84 members into local Posts and reinstate/ sign- up two additional members for a total of 86 members. The Service Officer was able to assist 7 veterans during this period.

At the beginning of the New Year I made my official visit to the Department of Oregon, to attend their Mid-Winter Department Executive Committee meetings January 8-11, 2016 held at Tigard Post#158. On Saturday morning Department Commander Mike Jones session by introducing Department Auxiliary President Angie McKinney, Detachment Commander Del White, myself, Linda Workman, National Auxiliary Vice President, Western Region and National Judge Advocate , Philip Onderdonk. Mr. Onderdonk began the agenda with some examples of cases that have come to the national organization and answered many questions from the participants. After the break each Department Officer and District Commander gave their reports. I was the speaker for the joint dinner on Saturday evening.

January 14-16, 2016 found me in the Department of Idaho for their Mid-Winter Conference. On Thursday evening The Department hosted a reception of the State legislators since we were very close to the capital; this was a very unique experience. The following day I visited many of the individual meetings, bringing greetings and making a few remarks. On Saturday the day began with the joint opening session followed by various
committee meetings. The evening was the Commanders Banquet where I was the guest speaker. On Sunday morning I participated in the Four Chaplains Service prior to my departure.

On February 5-7, 2016 I made my official visit to the Department of Utah to be a judge at their oratorical contest finals. We drove to Spanish Fork the morning of the contest where I had the opportunity to meet with some of the department and District as well as the NEC and Alternate NEC. We have some amazing and talented young people participating in our programs. After the conclusion of the contest we returned to Salt Lake City for a dinner with a mixture of American and VFW members where I made some remarks.

The Washington Conference was held on February 21-24, 2016 at the Washington Hilton. On Monday February 22, 2016 I visited a couple of the training sessions being offered during the conference. The following day, in the morning I attended the Commander’s Call for a briefing prior to going up to the hill to visit with Arizona’s two Senators; Senator McCain and Senator Flake; we discussed several different priority items with each office Senator Flake feels that the Flag Amendment is free speech.

Commander Barnett’s testimony on the hill was very well received. The Commander used the word “accountability” on several occasions during his remarks to make it clear that legislators and VA official must be accountable for the service they are providing our fellow veterans.

March 11-13, 2016 took me to the Department of California for their DEC meeting held at Post #56 in Santa Maria. After the opening ceremony and roll call Ms. Denise Rohan, Candidate for National Commander 2017-2018 was introduced by Gary Leach, Distinguished Guest Chairman. Ms. Rohan delivered her remarks; Mr. Hugh Crooks, NEC, introduced me and I delivered my remarks. The remainder of the time was used to hear and receive reports from District Commanders and various committees and commissions.

The Department of Wyoming invited me to attend their Spring Conferences on April 22-25, 2016. For District 2 and District 6; the District 2 conference was hosted by Post #10 in Wheatland after the opening ceremony I brought greetings from the national organization and presented my prepared remarks. I was honored to participate along with District Commander Curry presenting the French “Croix de Guerre” medal to a veteran from Wheatland for his service in Korea. That evening I attended a pot Luck Dinner hosted by Francis E. Self Post #6 in Cheyenne where I made some brief remarks. Sunday we were off to the District 6 conference hosted by Post #122 Commander Mike Sherr. I was the guest speaker and delivered my prepared remarks to the membership.

May 2-5, 2016 I attended the spring meetings and the National Commander’s dinner. On May 13-15, 216 I attended the National Commander’s Homecoming and participated in an Awareness Walk with the Commander at Fort Benning.

Directly from there I flew from Atlanta to Groton, Ct. to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy to present The American Legion Award to Ms. Meghan Fornaro.

On May 25, 2016 I drove to Las Vegas, NV to represent the National Commander on behalf of the American Legion at the Las Vegas Veterans Memorial Dedication Ceremony the following day, May 27, 2016. The memorial is a wonderful sight and a credit to the artist and the commission for the design showing a statue representing each of the war ears we have been engaged in.

The department of New Mexico invited me to spend a day at their Boys State program being held at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales. NEC Felix Trujillo met me at the Albuquerque Airport on May 31, 2016 and drove to Post 49 for a wonderful lunch. I had the opportunity to meet with Commander Bobbie Reumann and several other members of the Post. From there we drove to Clovis and checked into the hotel and then we went to Post 117 for a great dinner prepared by members of the Auxiliary. Commander David Blackman asked me to give some remarks prior to dinner.
After breakfast on June 1, 2016, we drove to Portales and met with the Boys State Director, James Baca and spent the day visiting with the boys. I was the guest speaker at the banquet that evening prior to returning to Clovis. On Thursday June 2, 2016 we departed Clovis back to the Airport and returned to Phoenix.

The Department of Colorado invited me to attend their Department Convention June 16-19, 2016 in Longmont, CO. I was invited to be the guest speaker at the joint opening session of the convention; I also had the opportunity to sit in on a few of the training classes being offered to attendees. I witnessed the installation of the newly elected officers for The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion.

On June 23-26, 2016 I was back in Arizona to participate in the Department Convention. On the opening session I was the key note speaker; given the opportunity to thank our membership for their support during my year as the National Vice Commander for the Western Region. I then presented my prepared remarks to the entire legion Family. I attended meetings of the committees and commissions that I had been assigned. On the final day, I installed the newly elected officers of the American Legion and the Sons of the American Legion and participated in the installation of my wife, Jan, as the newly elected President of the Auxiliary.

On July 15-17, 2016 I attended the Department of Nevada Convention held in Henderson, NV and sponsored by Post 40 in Henderson. A joint opening session (Legion & Auxiliary) began the convention. Commander Evans presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Post 40 for hosting this year’s convention. After a roll call of Officers was conducted Commander Evans announced the appointments of chairmen of various Convention Committees. The following day we received reports from the Convention Committees, Department Commander, District Commanders and Commissions. At this point I, as guest speaker, delivered my remarks and brought greeting from National Commander Barnett and the National organization. That evening we had a wonderful Legion Family Banquet with entertainment. On the final morning we began with a Past Commanders breakfast followed by a memorial service. The Convention and final credentials were presented, verified and accepted. The election of new officers was conducted with Bob Terhone being elected as the new Department Commander for 2016-2017. I then administered the Oath of Office to the Department newly elected officers. The Chaplain offered the closing prayer and the retiring of the colors ended the convention.

REPORT OF NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER
Jimmy F. Lane, Arkansas

Following is a chronological recap of activities I participated in representing the American Legion on behalf of National Commander Barnett during my tenure as National Vice Commander 2015/2016.

September 19, 2015, attended Post 64 membership drive dinner in Heber Springs, Arkansas.

October, 1-3, 2015, participated in District revitalization effort in Clarksville, Tennessee. Also met with personnel at Austin Peay University about starting a new American Legion Post on campus. Department of Tennessee to follow up.

October 10-15, 2015, Attended NEC meeting and participated in Fall Meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana.

November 11-15, 2015, participated in membership revitalization project in El Paso, Texas and reviewed set-up for Texas Department convention to be held in El Paso.

December 10-13, 2015, addressed members of the American Legion, Auxiliary, and Sons of the American Legion in Post meetings and participated in annual hospital visits in Augusta, Georgia. Department of Georgia exceeded 100% of their membership objective for the year.

January 8-10, 2016, addressed members of the American Legion and participated in Mid-Winter conference in North Little Rock, Arkansas.
January 14-20, 2016, participated in annual membership drive in Department of Florida. Visited and addressed 26 different Posts. Also spoke at Post 347 Lady Lake, Florida whose membership exceeded 6000 members for 2016.

January 28-31, 2016, attended Department of Texas Mid-Winter conference and addressed Legion members, Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion in Austin, Texas.

February 4-7, 2016, attended and made presentation to Legion members, Auxiliary, and Sons of the American Legion at Department of North Carolina Mid-Winter conference in Raleigh, North Carolina.


March 6-10, 2016, accompanied Commander Barnett on his visit to the Department of Arkansas. Visited 9 Posts and the State Capital where the Walk for Veterans was conducted Governor Asa Hutchinson met with Legion members addressed the group.

April 1, 2016, participated in Flag Education Program for 5th graders at East School in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

April 15-18, 2016, participated in revitalization program in Salem, Virginia for the Department of Virginia. During the process it was learned that a green beret, and several medals, including a purple heart, bronze star, air medals, plus Vietnam medals, had been dropped off at the local Post #3 by a Goodwill store who found them in a box of donated clothes. Upon reviewing the medals, it was noted that a Richard Keener was the recipient of the purple heart and bronze star. Using different computer search engines, I and Department Commander James Chapman were able to lean that a Sgt Richard Keener has passed away and was buried in Pennsylvania. Upon further investigation we were able to learn that Sgt Keener had a wife Pat, a son Robert, and a daughter Trisha. After further exhaustive searches we were able to locate his family in Los Angeles, California. After 28 years, on May 9, 2016, Sgt Keener’s beret and medals were returned to his family.

May 3-5, 2016, attended and participated in Spring Meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana.

May 30-June 01, 2016, I was honored to represent The American Legion in attendance the Air Force Academy awards ceremony and to present the American Legion Award to the Outstanding Cadet in Academic Performance, Cadet Jeffrey Herrala.

June 2-5, 2016, attended Department of South Carolina Convention in Columbia, South Carolina to address the Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion.

June 6-8, 2016, I was honored to represent and address the Scholars at Samsung American Legion Scholar Recognition Program in Washington DC.

June 10-12, 2016, attended and made presentation to members at Department of Louisiana convention in Alexandria, Louisiana.

June 16-19, 2016, attended and addressed members at Department of Florida convention in Orlando, Florida.

June 22-24, 2016, attended and addressed members at Department of Tennessee convention in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

August 5-7, 2016, attended Veterans Retreat at Chandler Camp, Jordon Dam YMCA Camp area in Wetumpka, Alabama. Event organized by Department of Alabama to provide therapy for veterans with TBI and PTSD.

Remainder of my term as National Vice Commander will be preparing for and attending the National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio August 26 thru September 1, 2016.

REPORT OF NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER
John W. Hargreaves, Maine

No report received.
REPORT OF NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER
Alan A. Davis, Sr., Minnesota

My year started on August 4, 2015 when I traveled National Headquarters in Indianapolis for a week of orientation and participated in the national membership workshop along with the four other National Vice Commander candidates. We received detailed briefings from each of the Division Directors and also toured the Geiger Center and Emblem Sales Division. We received training sessions on conducting media interviews and talking points of the organization. The following week I traveled with the other National Vice Commander Candidates to the Washington DC office. We were briefed on the current Legislative points, Veterans Employment and Education, National Security and Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.

At the 97th National Convention in Baltimore, MD on Thursday, September 3rd, I was nominated by my wife, Teresa Davis for the office of National Vice Commander. My first duty was to attend the National Executive Committee meeting where I was introduced as one of the National Vice Commanders. At the close of the Executive Committee meeting, we attended a short briefing and introduction by all Division Directors from the Indianapolis and Washington, DC offices. We attended the reception for newly elected National Commander, Dale Barnett of Georgia and American Legion Auxiliary President, Sharon Conatser of Illinois.

Back in Minnesota I attended a membership event on September 13, 2015 at the Legionville School Patrol training camp near Brainerd, MN.

On October 13th, I attended the National Commanders Banquet in Indianapolis. I also attended the National Executive Committee meeting on October 14-15, 2015. In addition to the activities of the Executive Committee, I made a short presentation on my American Legion experience and goals for the ensuing year.

On the evening of October 22, 2016 I attended a dinner with the Department of Minnesota leadership, and Candidate for National Commander Charles Schmidt. After the dinner I attended the Department of Minnesota Executive Committee meeting and the beginning of their Fall Conference.

My first Official was October 23-25, 2015 when I flew to Missouri to attend and participate in their annual Fall Conference in Jefferson City. I attended various meetings and membership breakfasts and brought greetings and made comments at each of these meetings. On the opening day I was the key note speaker at the joint opening. Throughout the day I visited with members of The American Legion Family and attended Committee meetings. On Sunday morning I attended the Missouri Department Executive Committee meeting and then departed.

On November 1, 2015 I traveled to the Department of Iowa to participate in their annual membership tour. The tour started with an appearance on KIOA radio to promote the membership tour and the Vets of Valor fundraiser co-sponsored by KIOA radio and the Department of Iowa. The tour included not only stops at several American Legion Posts to meet with Legionnaires and members of The American Legion Family, but also local community leaders. We also had the opportunity to visit with many businesses in eastern Iowa to thank them for their support of the Iowa Governor’s Home Town Iowa initiative to hire returning veterans. In Ottumwa Iowa I spoke to the JROTC group at Ottumwa High School and presented to awards for outstanding service. We took a small tour of the John Deere manufacturing facility in Ottumwa and presented them with a Blue Star Banner for their support of their employees serving on active Duty.

In Cedar Rapids Iowa we visited the Vietnam Veterans Exhibit, and met with veterans employed at Quaker Oats in Cedar Rapids. Each employee at Quaker Oats receives a challenge coin from the employer and it is displayed in a case showing the branch and time of service. During the week’s tour Commander Petersen, membership Director Rohner and I were able to also visit several city memorials to veterans of all eras. The conclusion of
the tour included a membership meeting and rally where I was the keynote speaker. I departed Iowa on November 7th and drove back to Minnesota.

On November 11th I flew to Wichita, KS to begin a membership tour of western Kansas. To begin the Tour I was driven the Wichita Post by Department Commander Ray Vail, and Department Adjutant Jimmy Foster for a Veterans Day dinner for all area veterans. After a ham and Navy bean dinner I made some brief remarks. The Post honored several WWII veterans. We were met at the Post by NEC Dave Warnken.

Stops along the way included Marquette, Hayes, Russell, Ness City and WaKeeney, where we also participated in a District revitalization event. We also visited the VAMC in Wichita. The conclusion of the membership tour was a dinner back at Wichita where I was again the main speaker for the evening.

My next visit was to the Department of Nebraska. I flew into Omaha on December 2, 2015 for the First District membership Tour. I was met at the Omaha Airport by Department Commander Mike Reimers. We drove from Omaha to Norfolk to begin the tour. At each stop on the tour members of The American Legion family collected cookies, clothing, and personal needs items for the residents at the VAMC in Hot Springs, SD. In Cody Wyoming we met with a Junior High School class that had a project to collect and design personal needs bags for residents. Each student designed their own bags, and they were labeled as either male or female residents.

Each evening along the stop we met with members of the local American Legion Posts where I was asked to give brief remarks. The final night of the tour was a membership dinner at the American Legion Post in Chadron, NE. At the dinner I was the keynote speaker. On Sunday morning, December 6, I was driven to the airport in Alliance, Nebraska where I flew back to Minnesota.

On Saturday, January 2, 2016 I made an unofficial visit to the Fourth District Mid-Winter in North St. Paul, Minnesota. I was introduced and spoke of the National Membership Program and other areas of interest regarding The American Legion and veterans. On January 9, 2016 I again made an unofficial visit to the Ninth District American Legion in Detroit Lakes, MN. I was asked to speak to the joint opening of all members of The American Legion Family with regard to programs of interest to the members.

I again returned to Nebraska on January 14, 2016 for my official visit to the Department of Nebraska for their annual Midyear conference. I drove from Minnesota to Nebraska City, Nebraska for the conference. On January 15th I attended the Nebraska DEC and was asked to bring greetings. On Saturday I addressed the joint opening session of the Midyear Conference. I was introduced by NEC Jerry Landkammer. During the day I listened to committee reports from the Chairs of The American Legion. On Sunday I attended the joint closing session of the midyear Conference and was asked to give some remarks. I then attended the Department Oratorical Contest as a guest. Following the awards ceremony I departed and drove back to Minnesota.

On January 24th I was scheduled to travel to Washington, DC to represent National Commander Dale Barnett at the unveiling of the concept of the WW1 memorial in Washington DC. Because of the blizzard in Washington that weekend, the trip was delayed until Monday the 25th. On Tuesday, January 26, I attended the Press Conference at the Washington Press Club. Also in attendance was Jim Whitfield, The American Legion’s representative on the WW1 Memorial Commission. I returned to Minnesota on January 27, 2016.

Later that week, on January 29 and 30, I made an unofficial visit to the 10th District membership event which included several stops at Legion Posts within the District. I was able to meet with several members of my home Post as well as many members of The American Legion Family along the route.

During the first week of February, National Commander Barnett made his visit to the Department of Minnesota. He visited Princeton, MN on February 1st for a light lunch and to address the members of The American Legion Family in attendance. I had the honor of
introducing Commander Barnett at that event. Also in attendance was a WWII veteran who was celebrating his 90th Birthday on that day.

February 21-24, 2016 was the Washington Legislative conference which was held at the Washington Hilton. On Monday of that week I spent the day attending several workshops, and the Minnesota Caucus. On Tuesday the 23rd, I attended the Commander’s Call for a briefing prior to going up to the hill to visit with representatives from the Minnesota’s congressional delegation as well as Senators Klobuchar and Franken. During the visits with the delegation, we discussed the legislative priorities with members. I spent time with my representative Tom Emmer who represents Minnesota’s 6th Congressional District. The next morning I had the honor of attending National Commander Barnett’s testimony before the joint Veterans Affairs committees of the House and Senate. The attendance at the testimony was overflowing the room, and Commander Barnett did an excellent job explain our priorities. The National Staff that was present also did a tremendous job and were well prepared for the testimony.

My Official visit to the Department of South Dakota was February 12 – 14, 2016. My wife Tess and I drove from Minnesota to Huron, South Dakota for their Mid-Winter Conference. We attended the Conference banquet on Friday evening the 12th, and I was the keynote speaker at the banquet. During the day Saturday we listened to presentations by program chairs and guest speakers including the South Dakota Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. On Saturday night I was the guest at the South Dakota Go-Getters dinner. Sunday morning we attended a memorial service, then attended the South Dakota Oratorical Contest finals. After the winners were announced and the awards were presented we departed Huron and drove back to Minnesota.

On March 5th I made my unofficial visit to the Department of Minnesota Department Executive Committee and Vice Commanders Appreciation membership Rally. At the Rally I was asked to give remarks. I spoke about continuing to work the 5 year Strategic Plan, and to continue to work the District and post revitalizations.

My second visit to Missouri was a membership and District revitalization events from Thursday March 10 until Monday, March 14. I arrived at the St. Louis airport and was met by Department Senior Vice Commander Betty Gonzales. Accompanying us on the Tour were NEC Charlie Goodin, Alternate NEC Kenny Goth, Department Adjutant Lowry Finley-Jackson, Zone 4 Vice Commander Sheryl Smith and Department historian Paul Bennett. Revitalizations were held a Post111 in Shrewbury, MO and Post 422 in St. Louis. At each of the Revitalizations a Department Service Officer was present to assist veterans with VA claims. Several successful membership transfers were made as well as new member signings. Each evening a dinner was held at a local Post where I was asked to give remarks. On Monday we visited Jefferson Barracks VAMC and Cemetery. After the tours I was driven back to the Airport and departed to Minnesota.

On Saturday, March 19th, I made an unofficial visit to Minnesota’s 8th District Mid-Winter in Virginia, MN. I was asked to bring greetings and make short remarks.

April 9th I made an unofficial visit to the Testimonial Dinner of Minnesota Department Commander Jim Kellogg. I was asked to make remarks, and introduce the keynote speaker for the evening, PNC Jimmy Foster.

On April 20, 2016 I departed for my official visit to the Department of Oklahoma. On the first night I was a guest at a private reception which included Commander Bobby Bryant, NEC Jerry Ball and their wives. The next day we traveled to Oklahoma City to view the site of the Alfred P Murray Federal Building bombing museum. After the visit to the museum we viewed the Oklahoma City Veterans Memorial. That evening we met with local members of The American Legion Family.

On Friday we traveled to the home Post of Department Commander Bryant, Cushing Post 108. I met with several local community leaders and American Legion family. I made short remarks and presented the Post Commander with a 100% pin and banner for the Post flag. Later that day we traveled to Ponca City, Oklahoma for a reception and dinner. I was the keynote speaker and gave a major address.
On Saturday I attended the Founder’s Day parade in Guthrie, Oklahoma. I rode in the parade, and was later interviewed on the local radio station which was broadcasting the parade on live radio. After the parade we stopped by the local Post in Guthrie with NEC Jerry Ball. That evening we returned to Edmund and our Hotel.

On Sunday I was given a tour of the aircraft museum at Tinker AFB and the Oklahoma Veterans Home, and then driven to the Airport by NEC Ball.

The spring Committee and Commission meetings and the Spring National Executive Committee were held in Indianapolis May 2 – 5, 2016. I arrived in Indianapolis on Sunday, May 1, and on Tuesday and Wednesday I attended the Americanism Commission meetings at the Indianapolis Sheraton on the Circle. The National Executive Committee meeting was held in the NEC room on the 4th floor of the Indianapolis Headquarters. On Wednesday evening I attended the National Commanders reception for Distinguished Guests held at the Sheraton Hotel. After the NEC meeting on May 5, I returned to Minnesota.

On May 13th, my wife and I flew to Atlanta, GA, and then drove to Pine Mountain, Georgia to attend the National Commander’s homecoming. We attended the reception on Friday night and the Commander’s Banquet on Saturday night. On Sunday we drove back to the Atlanta Airport and flew back to Minnesota.

My Official visit to the Department of Kansas was from May 19 – 22. I flew to Wichita, KS, and was driven to the Convention site at Hutchinson, KS by Past National Vice Commander Paul Sanford. The Convention began with a joint opening of American Legion Family on May 20. I was asked to bring greetings to the assembly. On Saturday I attended the awards ceremony luncheon, listened to reports given by committee chairs. The Convention concluded on Sunday morning and I also participated in the post Convention DEC. After the DEC, I was driven back to Wichita and flew back to Minnesota.

It was my honor to be selected to represent national Commander Barnett at the 2016 Commencement of the US Naval Academy, and to present The American Legion plaque and gift to an outstanding graduate. I arrived at Annapolis on Wednesday, May 25. I was invited to attend the Colors Parade on Thursday the 26th as a Distinguished Guest and received priority seating for the event. After the Colors Parade, I was invited to attend a reception prior to the Awards Ceremony. During the Academic Awards presentations I presented The American Legion Prize to Midshipman 1st Class Ethan Dalton for the highest overall academic standing among those political science majors emphasizing the study of international relations.

After the Awards Ceremony I was invited to a post ceremony reception and an opportunity to meet with Midshipman Dalton. After the reception I returned to my Hotel and departed Annapolis on Friday May 27 to return to Minnesota.

I was also deeply honored to represent The American Legion and National Commander Dale Barnett at the Memorial Day Observance in Washington DC at Arlington National Cemetery. I arrived at Regan Airport in Washington DC on Sunday, May 29. I was met at the airport by Washington Headquarters Staff member Matt Schumann, who drove me to my hotel and assisted with my check-in. On Monday morning, May 30, Matt picked me up at my hotel and stopped by the Washington DC Headquarters to pick up DC Executive Director Verna Jones who would accompany me to the White House for breakfast and to Arlington Cemetery for the Memorial Day Program. We arrived at the White House and were directed to the 2nd floor where the breakfast was being served. After the breakfast we had an opportunity to meet with President Obama and have our picture taken with him.

After the picture session, we were escorted unto buses for the trip to Arlington Cemetery. We were seated in The American Legion box seats for the ceremony. I was also to lay a wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that morning.

After leaving Arlington I was driven to the Vietnam Veterans memorial site by Matt Schuman. We were met there by DC Executive Director Verna Jones and Media &
Communications member Andrea Dickerson. The guest speaker for the event was retired Marine Corp Captain Dale Dye. At the conclusion of the ceremony I laid a wreath in conjunction with other Veterans Organizations. Following the wreath laying, the ceremony concluded with the playing of taps.

In June I was the guest of Princeton American Legion Post 216 to ride in the Rum River Days Parade, and Champlain Post 600 to ride in the Father Hennepin Days parade.

My next official visit was to the Department of North Dakota for their annual Convention in Fargo, North Dakota. My wife and I drove to Fargo and participated in National Commander Barnett’s Veterans Awareness Walk. On Friday after the Awareness Walk we attended the Joint Opening Session and I was asked to make some opening remarks. On Saturday I attended several Committee meetings, and the Legion Awards Luncheon, which included Youth winners and scholarship recipients. That evening I attended the Department Convention Banquet, where Commander Barnett was the keynote speaker.

On Sunday morning I attended the Press Association Breakfast and the Joint Memorial Service. After attending the Legion closing session, we again departed for Minnesota.

I was invited back to Iowa for an Official visit for their Department Convention from July 15 – 17 at Coralville Iowa. My wife and I drove to the Convention Center on Friday, July 15. We attended the Joint Opening Session that evening and I addressed the American Legion Family in attendance.

On Saturday morning I attended the Iowa Foundation breakfast to honor Foundation recipients. I attended the general sessions that morning, and then the Past District Commanders Luncheon where I gave some remarks. I then attended the general sessions in the afternoon, and dinner with Iowa leadership that evening.

On Sunday the 17th, I attended the General session, and after brief remarks we departed Coralville for Minnesota.

The following week I made my Official visit to the Department of Minnesota at their Department Convention in Rochester, MN. On Wednesday evening, July 20, I attended the Department Americanism Committee meeting and then the Department DEC meeting later that evening.

On Thursday the 21st, I visited the District Caucuses, and then attended the general session of The American Legion where I gave a short address, and then assisted in presenting the Post Excellence award. I then went to the Auxiliary session to bring greetings to the American Legion Auxiliary. In the afternoon I attended Committee meetings and attended a meeting with the Volunteer Service Coordinators from the Minnesota Veterans Homes.

On Friday I listened to reports by Convention Committees. We after the election of new officers we departed Rochester for home.

**REPORT OF NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER**

**Daivd L. Gough, Wisconsin**

Before being elected, the Vice Commander candidates were given orientations in Indianapolis and in Washington DC. Dates were August 2nd to 7th in Indianapolis and August 11th to 14th in Washington DC.

During August 29th to September 3rd, we attended the National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland, where I was elected National Vice Commander. My nomination was given by Denise Rohan, endorsed candidate for National Commander from Wisconsin.

On September 20th my Post hosted a “Homecoming” for me.

In October, 8th to 10th, I attended the American Legion Riders Advisory Committee meetings in Indianapolis. Legacy Scholarship Fund was the major topic. The National Fall meetings were held from the 10th to 15th.

Attended the Wisconsin Fall meetings at Portage on October 16th to 17th.
On October 24th, attended a funeral of a Past Department Sgt. at Arms who was a close friend of mine, and fellow Legion Rider.

On October 25th attended the Wisconsin Third District Fall Conference where I serve as Judge Advocate.

In November, at Darlington Post 214, attended a Choral and Band concert put on by the 2nd and 7th grade classes at Darlington Middle School. Titled; Salute to Veterans.

On November 7th I attended the State meeting of the Wisconsin American Legion Riders.

In November, I was appointed by National Commander Barnett to represent The American Legion at the Veterans Day program in Washington DC. We had breakfast at the White House, pictures taken with President Obama and Vice President Biden. After breakfast, we were bused to Arlington National Cemetery for the President speech. I was seated on the Dias behind the President during his speech. After Arlington, we went to the Vietnam Wall Memorial for another ceremony and wreath laying. I was escorted by Director Verna Jones for part of the day. I left home on the 10th and arrived back home on the 12th.

On November 19th to 22nd, I had my first visit, to Illinois for the Egyptian Past Commanders Jamboree, in the Carbondale, Illinois area. Visited the Marion VA Hospital.

On December 2nd, I attended the Post meeting at my home Post and on December 9th participated in the Post Oratorical Contest.

On December 11th- 12th, attended the Wreath laying at King Veterans Home held by the Wisconsin Legion Riders. I was the Guest Speaker. There were two staff members from National at this event also, filming and taking pictures.

On January 6th, attended my Post meeting at the Post home.

On January 7th, left for the Illinois Membership Caravan, meeting up with the State Commander in Belvidere, Illinois. For the next 10 days we traveled Illinois, stopping at three Posts per day, picking up membership and encouraging strong participation. We visited the Jesse Brown VA Hospital in Chicago also. Well organized event.

On January 16th, I was driven to Wisconsin Dells by Past National Commander Marty Conatser where we attended the Wisconsin Mid-Winter conference.

On January 21st to 24th, I attended the Mid-Winter Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

In February I visited West Virginia for their Winter Conference, leaving home on the 3rd and returning home on the 7th.

On February 19th I drove to Washington DC for the Conference and attended the Commander’s Testimony before the Joint Session. I held a membership seminar for the Central and Midwest regions while there. I left DC on the 24th.

From February 26th to the 29th, I participated in a Past Department Commander’s Membership Caravan in Ohio.

On March 2nd, attended the meeting at my Post in Darlington. On the weekend of the 12th and 13th, I participated in an Open House and Steak Feed on Saturday and the Post Birthday Banquet on the 13th where I was the emcee.

On March 16th, I attended the Lafayette County meeting where I served as Commander.

On March 21st, we hosted a Listening Session at our Post where Wisconsin Secretary of Veterans Affairs was our guest. Secretary Scocos presented me with a Certificate.

On March 31st, I attended the Grant County Awards Banquet where I was the Guest speaker. This is Home to PNC Keith Kreul.

On April 23rd, I attended the Third District Conference, where I serve as Judge Advocate.

We left for Indianapolis on April 30th to attend the National Spring Meetings, which lasted through May 5th. I had the privilege of standing in line for the Denise Rohan Hospitality room.

On May 6th to the 8th I attended the Department of Indiana for a membership effort.
I was chosen to attend the graduation ceremony at West Point Military Academy. Drove out on the 18th, spent some time visiting with parents and former graduates, attended the ceremony and presented the National American Legion Award to Brian Bui and returned home the next day. May 18th to 21st.

I attended the Wake for Past National Historian Bobbi Stuvengen on May 27th.

On Memorial Day I was the Guest Speaker in Darlington, Wisconsin

On June 16th I was the Guest speaker at the Wisconsin American Legion Riders ‘Kick-off’ event for the Wisconsin Legacy Run.

June 17th, I left for Ohio to participate in Buckeye Boys State, returning home on the 19th.

On June 23rd I left for Sault Ste Marie, Michigan to attend their State Convention, returning home on June 26th.

On July 13th I left for Madison to attend the Wisconsin Department Convention which will be held July 14th to 17th in Madison, Wisconsin. National Commander Barnett was with us the entire weekend. SAL National Vice Commander Dennis Henkemeyer was also present.

Adjutant Wheeler asked me to represent him at the re-dedication of the Ohio Department Headquarters on August 5th to 7th., great event.

On August 25th, we will leave for the National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio which will end my term on September 1st.

I have driven to all invites and Call-ins except the Veterans Day invite in Washington DC. The total miles driven will be in excess of 20,000 miles.

REPORT OF THE ACTING NATIONAL CHAPLAIN
Rev. Dr. Tierian Cash, North Carolina

Rev. Dr. Tierian “Randy” Cash assumed the position of Acting National Chaplain of The American Legion upon the illness and subsequent death of Rev. Dr. H.C. “Ted” Kelley of The American Legion Department of Pennsylvania.

- Chaplain Cash co-hosted the Annual Chaplains Conference during the National Americanism Conference held in Indianapolis 25-27 September 2015. As Past National Chaplain, the Rev. Dr. Cash presented his Past National Chaplain’s report on the state of the Service to God and Country program. Chaplain Cash presented an overview the past year’s events. During breakout sessions department chaplains discussed the current role and issues facing chaplains. Plans were developed for a new Back to God emphasis. The chaplains developed three areas of emphasis, public relations, education, and chaplain recognition.
- On November 11, 2015, he was the guest speaker at the Lincolnnton, North Carolina Veteran’s Day Ceremony.
- He attended the Department Service Officer School and Washington Conference in Washington D.C., February 21-24, 2016. Due to the fact that Chaplain Cash served as the guest chaplain in both the Senate and the House of Representatives in 2015, he was not able to fulfill this function in 2016.
- Attended and served as guest chaplain at the Department Oratorical Contest finals held in Marion, North Carolina.
- Chaplain Cash attended the Spring Meetings in Indianapolis, May 3-5, 2016, where he opened the meetings with prayer and closed in the same manner.
- On May 28, 2016, Chaplain Cash traveled to St. James Franklin, North Carolina, where he was the speaker for Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremonies.
- Chaplain Cash attended Boy’s Nation in Washington D.C. July 23-25, 2016, where he spoke at the Memorial Service on Sunday, July 23, 2016,
and he assisted National Commander Dale Barnett in laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns on Monday, July 25, 2016. During the Memorial Service, he shared memories of his time in Afghanistan as the theater chaplain and principles of Religious Liberty in America. Along with the Boys Nation senators and staff, he attended a dinner at Greenbelt American Legion Post 136 in Maryland offering the invocation and benediction. In addition to his ceremonial duties he interacted with the young men in attendance regarding faith and military experiences.

- Chaplain Cash has served as the American Legion World Series Chaplain in Shelby, North Carolina, since 2012. He continued those duties in this capacity while serving as National Chaplain. In addition to offering prayers before the games, he conducted the POW/MIA remembrance, Veterans Recognition ceremonies, and served as a member of the Scholarship Selection Committee.

- **National Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio**, August 27 –September 1, 2016. The theme of the Patriotic Memorial Service held Sunday, August 30, 2016 at 11:00a.m. was entitled “Keeping The Faith.” An article regarding the service written by Jeffrey Stoffer, Director of the Marketing, Media & Communications Division at The American Legion national headquarters follows:

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution share a common priority: faith as a guiding influence. American Legion National Chaplain Rev. Tierian “Randy” Cash made the case Sunday that religious belief and morality, regardless of doubters in America today, is the foundation upon which the United States and the nation’s largest veterans service organization both were built.

“The American Legion affirmed in its first proclamation (that) service to God is the most important duty a citizen can fulfill,” Rev. Cash told thousands who gathered in Cincinnati Sunday for the 2016 American Legion National Convention Patriotic Memorial Service. Referring to the beginning of the Legion’s constitutional preamble – “For God and country, we associate ourselves together…” – he called upon his fellow veterans and their families “to once again stand unapologetically on the principles on which we were founded – first and foremost, service to God, and, secondly, service to our great nation. If we do not, we have no ground to stand on. It is time for The American Legion to harness its power and influence in the cause of religious liberty which is being systematically threatened.”

Rev. Cash spoke of the moral and religious inspiration behind such developments in America as the abolition of the slave trade, the Emancipation Proclamation and the civil rights movement. “These great advances were not motivated and moved by secular ethics or people who believed in moral relativism. They were driven primarily by persons who had a clear religious vision of what was morally right.”

In recent years, however, religious freedom as protected in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution has been threatened, he explained. “Powerful secular interests are challenging the way religious beliefs and the practices of faith-based organizations stand in the way of their secular aims,” Rev. Cash said. “In the long run, the vitality of religious freedom must rely on public understanding and support.”

Challenges to the place of religion in American society have come in the form of legal movements to remove religious symbols from public places, including monuments and memorials that honor military sacrifices, and debates over prayer in school. “Some influential leaders and many educators have come to consider it bad taste or even illegal for public schools even to mention religious influences and motivations,” Rev. Cash said. “A continuation of this trajectory of ignorance and advocacy of diminished religious freedom – inhibiting the free exercise of religion in favor of other, though often worthy, social goals, will fundamentally change the character of America, and not for the better.”
During the service, the national chaplain called upon Legionnaires of different religious denominations to “walk shoulder to shoulder on the same path in order to secure our freedom to pursue our separate ways... We must also insist on our constitutional right to exercise our beliefs and to voice our consciences on issues in the public square and in the halls of justice. These are the rights of all citizens, including religious believers, leaders and organizations.”

Sunday’s ceremony was dedicated to the memory of Rev. Dr. H.C. “Ted” Kelley of the Department of Pennsylvania, who passed away during his 2015-2016 term as American Legion National Chaplain. He was recognized for his service and a friend of Rev. Cash, at the beginning of the service. Longtime organist, Peter Ole, who served as maestro for the ceremony and in American Legion national convention general sessions for decades was also remembered. Ole was unable to attend the convention this year for only the second time since beginning these duties. Performing at the service and convention in his place was Rick Pedro, son of the late Richard Pedro, American Legion Past National Commander and longtime Department of New York adjutant.

Sunday’s service included patriotic music by Cincinnati’s Circle Singers, wreath-laying ceremonies and lighting of the POW/MIA Candle of Remembrance by 2016 American Legion Boys Nation President Aniyagh Crocker of Tennessee.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL HISTORIAN
James E. Copher, Minnesota

The 2015–2016 membership year started with the end of the 97th National Convention and the election of the 2016 National Vice Commanders, Danial Cusing (AZ) Western region, Alan Davis SR. (MN) Midwest region, David Gough (WIS) Central region, John Hargreaves (ME) Northern region, Jimmy Lane (ARK) Southern region, and our New National Commander Dale Barnnet of Georgia. After the installation of these officers the National Executive Committee would meet and approve the Commanders selection for National Chaplain Rev Dr H C “Ted” Kelly (PA), National Sgt-At-Arms Danial Zimmermann (GA), and National Historian James Ellis Copher Sr of (MN). After the approval by the NEC these Legionaries would be installed by Commander Barnnet for 2015–16 membership year. On a sad note Chaplain Kelly would be call to the Post Everlasting Apr 10, 2016. Past National Chaplain Tierian Randy Cash will fill out the remainder of the year.

As national historian my first task was the overseeing of the judging of post and department history books for the year 2014-2015. A thank you and job well done goes out to the post and department historians for the hard work they put into persevering the history of The American Legion. I would like to thank the members of the National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion (NADHAL) for their assistance with the judging of the 2014-2015 history books. A special thanks to Past National Historian Charemon Dunham of (SD) for teaching the new department historians how to judge and conduct their own department contests. Also I would like to thank her and Past National Historian Frazier Brinley of (CT) for their help in coordinating the 2014-2015 contest. And a special thanks goes to Howard Trace and the library staff for all of their assistance.

The results for the 2014-2015 contest areas follows.

The results of the One-Year Department Narrative History Contest are:
First Award, Plaque, Department of North Carolina
Second Award, Plaque, Department of Indiana
Honorable Mention, Department of Georgia

The results of the One-Year Department Yearbook History Contest are:
First Award, Plaque, Department of Nebraska
Second Award, Plaque, Department of North Carolina
Third Award, Plaque, Department of Florida
Honorable Mention, Department of North Dakota
Certificates of Participation are awarded to Departments:
  Department of Louisiana
  Department of Massachusetts
  Department of Ohio
  Department of South Dakota
  Department of Washington

The results of the One-Year Post Narrative History Contest are:
  First Award, Plaque, Banks Post 90, Banks, OR
  Second Award, Plaque, Pony Express Post 359, St. Joseph, MO
  Third Award, Plaque, Carroll Post 143, Carrollton, GA

Certificates of Participation are awarded to Posts:
  Earl Graham Post 159, Bryan, TX
  Berkeley Post 14, Martinsburg, WV
  Smith Mountain Lake Post 62, Moneta, VA

The results of the One-Year Post Yearbook History Contest are:
  First Award, Plaque, Carroll Post 143, Carrollton, GA
  Second Award, Plaque, Alois-Dreikosen Post 469, Marathon, WI
  Third Award, Plaque, Frierson-Nichols Post 8, Winter Haven, FL
  Honorable Mention, Cornville Post 135, Cornville, AZ

Certificates of Participation are awarded to Posts:
  Parker County Post 163, Weatherford, TX
  Criswell-Robinson Post 71, Cabot, AR
  Fort Owen Post 94, Stevensville, MT
  Berkeley Post 14, Martinsburg, WV
  Charles S. Hatch Post 79, Berwick, ME
  Rosedale Post 180, Rosedale, MD
  Ernest F. Oldenburg Post 216, Milford, MI
  Williston Post 144, Williston Park, NY
  Carl Douglas Post 74, Estacada, OR
  Carroll Post 143, Carrollton, GA
  Donaldson-Walker Post 108, Cushing, OK
  Douglas M. Lyons Post 72, Big Rock, TN
  Harold B. Jarrett Post 342, Salisbury, NC
  Melvin Mayfield Post 804, Newark, OH
  Glen Pedersen Post 1, Spencer, IA
  Montpelier Post 3, Montpelier, VT
  Bass-Bowen-Brittenham-Franklin-Knox Post 55, Fredericksburg, VA
  Bryan Mudgett- T.J. Trevino Post 7, Carlsbad, NM
  Clark Post 328, Clark, NJ
  William H. Jutras Post 43, Manchester, NH
  Abbeville Post 2, Abbeville, SC
  Florence-Lauderdale Post 11, Florence, AL

The instructors, historians and judges for the contest were:
  Virgil Arling (OH); Ernest Berry (MI); W. Frazier Brinley (CT); George Buchanan (WI); Nellie P. DeBaker (WI); Robert C. De Carlo (CT) (MI); Robert J. Coyle (PA); Charemon Dunham (SD); Jackie Evonson (CT); James Fratolillo (MA); Robert Gilmore (AZ); Joseph Hovish (IN); Johanna J. Jenkins (UT); Johnny B. Keel (LA); Susan Mason (FL); Julio C. Martinez Malava (PR); James A. Mariner (NM); Rex C. McBee (TN); N. Larry Rozier (NC); Jennifer Salak (NE); Fred Simbro (GA); Sharon Smith (OH); Dan Watrous (OH); Charles ‘Chuck’ Zelinsky (IL)

This February I attended the Washington Conference and the National Commanders testimony before a Joint hearing of the Senate and House committees on Veterans Affairs. In attendance were the National President Sharon Conatser of the auxiliary, the Kevin Collier National commander of the SAL and many members of American Legion family.
The delegation was large enough that it was standing room only and many where standing in the hall way.

In May I attended the Commanders home coming at the Callaway resort and to Ft Benning GA for an Awareness Walk for Veterans. The Awareness walk was very well attended and getting to tour the Infantry Museum after the walk was well attended as well. May was also the Spring meeting of the National Executive Committee and of the 100th Anniversary committee as well. I reported on my actives as Historian for the past year to NEC. And during the past year I answered many emails and phone calls about the Contest at the fall NEC. How to place a History Books in the contest for judging and what to use as a guide line rules.

I look forward to the National Convention in Cincinnati and meeting with historians from around the nation, and at the Historians Luncheon on Saturday the 27th. I would again like to thank Commander Barnett for appointing me as the National Historian for the 2015–2016 membership year. This has been a once in a life time event.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL JUDGE AVOCATE
P . B. Onderdonk, Jr., Maryland

Contracts

The following one hundred and seven (107) contracts have been reviewed or prepared:

1. Articles of Agreement by and between The American Legion and The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Indiana, covering the convocation of the 2019 Convention of The American Legion in the City of Indianapolis, State of Indiana, have been executed.

2. A Memorandum of Agreement by and between The American Legion and National Veterans Legal Services Program, whereby National Veterans Legal Services will provide consultations, informal training of Department Service Officers, BVA staff and claims/representatives, case work review, briefings on proposed changes in law and regulations and assistance in methods for prompt adjudication of veterans’ appeal cases.

3. An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Enterprise Holdings (EAN Services, LLC), to cover vehicle rentals to Legion employees.

4. A Service agreement by and between The American Legion and Communications Products, Inc. (CPI), for a maintenance agreement for one year for our phone systems.

5. An Agreement by and between The American Legion and MediaRadar, Inc., a database tool for the magazine advertising to increase new advertisers and keep current advertisers.

6. An Agreement by and between The American Legion (Emblem Sales) and Wilson Sporting Goods. This agreement replaces the previous agreement for customized baseballs and baseball uniforms bearing The American Legion emblem.

7. A Service Agreement by and between The American Legion and Fuller Engineering Service Corporation, whereby Fuller Engineering will provide maintenance on the Liebert Equipment in the computer room.

8. An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Dell Marketing L.P., whereby The American Legion will market the Dell Federal Member Computer Discount Purchase Program to its various associations, employees, members and affiliates.

9. An Agreement by and between The American Legion and KBM (KnowledgeBase Marketing-Mutual of Omaha) for marketing of insurance products for Legion members.

10. An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Norlight Telecommunications, Inc., whereby Norlight Telecommunications, Inc. will provide a dedicated internet port and service of same for The American Legion’s computer system.

11. Housing contract between The American Legion and Marymount University to provide for lodging and food service for American Legion Boys Nation held in July 2016.

12. A Memorandum of Understanding by and between The American Legion and The United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), whereby The American Legion
will assist the United States Army Recruiting Command to improve the recruiting environment for Army recruiters and USAREC will provide information regarding American Legion activities and special community events to local units, bulletins and newsletters.

(13) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and the James G. Elliott Co., Inc. for integration into the JGECO M-PANEL Services software.

(14) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and ProSidian Consulting, LLC, for research services to assess perceptions of and satisfaction with Women Veterans health care.

(15) A contract by and between The American Legion and Edge Direct, LLC for direct marketing and direct response fundraising.

(16-19) Four (4) Non-Disclosure Agreements by and between The American Legion and the Moore Group have been executed to cover the protection of magnetic tapes used for mass-mailings to the general membership of The American Legion:

CDR, Resource One, Inc., Edge Direct, LCC and First Degree, LCC

(20) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and the Hyatt Regency Washington, DC for guest rooms for the 50th Anniversary of Vietnam War Ceremony.

(21) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Samsung Electronics America, Inc. to establish a Samsung American Legion Alumni Association.

(22) Maintenance Agreement by and between The American Legion and Comtech Group for the IBM Software subscription for the AS400 and RS6000 computer software.

(23) A Memorandum of Understanding by and between The American Legion and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation for web-based information portals on TAL website.

(24) A Contract by and between The American Legion and Defense Mobile Corporation which offers wireless and mobile application products and services to its members, specifically designed and solely offered to veterans and military service members and their families.

(25) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and We Are the Mighty for a series of videos containing interviews of members across the nation for a one year term.

(26) Maintenance and Sales Agreement by and between The American Legion and US Automatic Fire and Security for fire protection for the Geiger facility.

(27) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Dydacom Development Corporation for an updated version of mail order manager software used by Emblem Sales.

(28) Annual Maintenance agreement by and between The American Legion and Eaton Power Quality Corporation to provide maintenance and perform preventative maintenance checks on the Uninterruptible Power System (UPS) which regulates the power spikes to the AS400 and is the battery backup in case of a power outage.

(29) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Caremark Pharmacy Discount Prescription for discount prescription program.

(30) A Purchase Agreement by and between The American Legion and Managing Editor, Inc. (MEI) for K4 Publishing System software to be used by the Magazine Division.

(31) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and the US Small Business Administration Office of Veterans Business Development to develop veteran-owned small business in the local area.

(32) A Service Agreement by and between The American Legion and Koorsen Fire & Security for fire alarm and detection systems.


(34) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Pitney Bowes Software, Inc. for software products.

(36) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Lindenmeyr Central for the purchase of paper for national headquarters.

(37) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Time Warner telephone and data lines services which includes firewall management, internet “pipe,” main voice lines, data line to DC office and data line to the Geiger facility.

(38) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Civilian Marksmanship Program for staff and set-up and maintenance for a portable electronic target scoring system for the American Legion Junior Air Rifle National Championships.

(39) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Days Inn for favorable room rates during the 2016 Legacy Run in Kent, Ohio.

(40) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and the Hampton Inn for favorable room rates during the 2016 Legacy Run in Somerset, Pennsylvania.

(41) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Holiday Inn Express for 2016 World Series staff and team housing.

(42) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and USA Shooting for use of their range and meal tickets for participants of the 2016 Junior Air Rifle National Championship.


(44) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Honeywell Building Solutions for integrator and/or digital video manager software products.

(45) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and USAA to provide financial products and services to members of the U.S. military and their families.

(46) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and White & Company to produce two publications for the Legion.

(47) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Mercier Creative, LLC for production management during the 2016 national convention.

(48) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Hedges & Associates for proposed grant-related services for TAL.

(49) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Sheraton Indianapolis City Centre Catering for catering the 500 Festival Lanai Deck event.

(50) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and HearPO Corp. to provide discounted hearing care products and or services to Legion members.

(51) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company for printing and distributing the American Legion Magazine.

(52) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Mid-America Elevator Co., Inc. for maintenance of the elevators at 700 N. Pennsylvania Street building.

(53) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Diamond Sports Co., Inc. for academic scholarships to American Legion baseball players.

(54) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and JT Packard for maintenance and break fix for the uninterrupted power supply that handles the servers in the computer room at national.

(55) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Xerox for CF 495 Printer and maintenance services and deliverables of their products.

(56) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and AT&T for mobile device and service plan discounts.

(57) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Manpower for a temporary employee.

(58) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Honeywell International for electrical work done in connection with the Endowment Room remodel.

(59) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Motel 6 LLC to promote a member discount program on the Legion website.
(60) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Military Advantage, Inc. (Military.com) for exchanging editorial content for mutual postings on respective websites.

(61) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and Old Jim Customs, LLC, for permission to use The American Legion name and emblem on their merchandise.

(62) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and DoubleTree by Hilton for meeting rooms and housing during the American Legion Baseball 2016 Northeast Regional Tournament.

(63) An Agreement by and between The American Legion and AnswerNet for call center services.

(64) A Rental Agreement by and between The American Legion and Reliable Water Services for the rental of a water heater for the national headquarters building.

(65) A Licensing Agreement by and between The American Legion and Vermont Teddy Bear for use of the name and emblem as a national corporate sponsor.

(66) A Member Agreement by and between The American Legion and Gigya, Inc. for website software.

(67-72) Agreements by and between The American Legion and the following American Legion posts for the 2015-2016 American Legion Baseball Regional Tournament Agreement: ND Post 1, WY Post 6, VA Post 34, IL Post 126, AR Post 16 and NC Post 45.

(73) Assignment of Agreement by and between The American Legion and LSC Communications US, LLC (formally RR Donnelley) for printing and distributing the American Legion Magazine.

(74) Agreement by and between The American Legion and GfK US, LLC (formally MRI) for software used by the Magazine

Thirty-three (33) Subcontractor Standard List Protection Agreements by and between The American Legion and the following companies have been executed to cover the protection of magnetic tapes used for mass mailings to the general membership of The American Legion:

Aberdeen American News
Alliance for Audited Media
American Litho, Inc.
CES Mail Communications, Inc.
Crell Direct Mail
Daily Freeman Journal
Data-Mail, Inc.
DMRA
Edge Direct
Fair Isaac Corporation
Fiserv Solutions, Inc.
Forum Communications Printing
Golden Rule Publishing
HearPO Corp
JH Marketing Services
Kramers Mailing Service
Leader Printing
LifeStation, Inc.
Mainstreet Media
Moore Wallace Response Marketing
Response Solutions, LLC
River’s Edge Printing
Royle Printing Company
R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company
SeQuel Response, LLC
Litigation

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTY OF SCHUYLKILL

Daniel Jeffrey Steich  
Plaintiff  
S-2371-2005

v.

THE AMERICAN LEGION  
POST NO. 575, ET AL

Defendants

The case was filed in Pennsylvania by filing a Praecipe for Summons. Under Pennsylvania law, a complaint need not be filed for several years unless the defendant insists. We see no reason to start spending the money. Accordingly, we are keeping an eye on the case. It cannot go forward until the plaintiff does file his complaint. The court has sent notice it intends to terminate this case unless a party fills out a Statement of Intention to Proceed before October 1, 2008. Despite this, the case is still pending.

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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Lionel Guerra,  
Petitioner  

v.  

Eric K. Shinseki,  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs,  
Respondent.

No. 11-773

This case involves The American Legion proceeding as an amicus curiae with pro bono counsel on behalf of a veteran. The veteran has a number of disabilities from his combat injuries. These are: A 70% rating for an upper-extremity gunshot wound; a 70% rating for post-traumatic stress disorder; a 40% rating for injuries to his left leg and thigh; a 40% rating for injuries to his right leg and thigh; and a 30% rating for neuropathy. While none of his disabilities was individually rated at 100%, the total of the individual disabilities is 100%.

The VA would not give Mr. Guerra 100%. The Federal Circuit determined that he was not entitled to 100% disability because it was giving deference to the administrative decision of the VA.

This decision violates the pro-veteran canon of the U.S. law and the veterans’ law. The Federal Circuit relied upon the Chevron case, which under the administrative procedure law would give deference to the administrative agency where the matter was ambiguous.

In this case, the Supreme Court has already ruled in the number of cases that in an ambiguous situation involving a veteran that the court should rule in favor of the veteran.
This is based upon, inter alia, *Henderson v. Shinseki*, another case in which The American Legion appeared as an amicus. No decision yet.

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**IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FEDERAL CIRCUIT**


ERIC K. SHINSEKI, Secretary Of Veterans Affairs, Respondent-Appelle.

Appeal from the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims In Case No. 10-4222, Judge Alan G. Lance, Sr.

In this case, The American Legion is an amicus because the Veterans Administration has not been properly applying the proper rating. The veteran does not clearly meet the higher rating, but is significantly more disabled than the lower rating he was given. Since the veteran more nearly approximates the higher rating, the law says that is the one that should be awarded.

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND**

American Humanist Association, Case No. cv-14-550

Steven Lowe, Fred Edwards, and Bishop McNeill

*Plaintiffs*,

v.

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission,

*Defendant*.

The American Humanist Association sued to compel destruction of the “Bladensburg Cross” which is on state land. It was erected on private property that was taken to enlarge a road intersection. It was erected by The American Legion in 1925 as a veteran’s memorial. One of the plaintiffs is “upset” to see it. National, the Department of Maryland and the Bladensburg post are amici and will file to protect the cross.

On September 18, 2014, the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, allowed The American Legion, the Department of Maryland and Colmar Manor Post No. 131 to be admitted as intervening defendants.

I was deposed March 4, 2015.

Our brief has been filed to seek Summary Judgement.

Summary Judgement was granted.

The plaintiffs have appealed to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Our brief has been filed. The Appellants will have a chance to file a Reply Brief, then Arguments will be scheduled.
UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE FEDERAL CIRCUIT  

Michael L. McKinney  
The National Veterans Legal Services Program  
The Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Vietnam Veterans of America, and  
The American Legion  

Petitioners,  

v.  

Robert A. McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs,  
Respondent.

The American Legion has joined the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), the Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Vietnam Veterans of America to petition for a review of the Korean DMZ Agent Orange Regulation to correct an erroneous effective date that serves to bar benefits. It should be moved back from February 24, 2011, to November 1, 2004. The Veterans Administration has refused to allow benefits prior to February 24, 2011, as that was the date of the liberalized regulation even though the spraying was done in 1968 and 1969. An earlier regulation allowed a presumptive period of July 31, 1969 to August 31, 1971. We also desire a stay as to all claims filed before February 24, 2011, pending the appeal. The federal circuit ruled for the VA. We have filed for a rehearing or en banc review.

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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWENTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT  
IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF LEE, FLORIDA  

DANIEL A. BERNATH,  

Plaintiff,  

Vs.  

SUMMONS  

TERENCE B. HOEY, individually,  

DAN R. HYATT, individually,  

THE AMERICAN LEGION, business  
form unknown,  

MARK C. SEAVEY, individually,  

Defendants.

This individual has not served the national organization, but claims he served an employee which is good enough. We are watching both cases and have local counsel. We will move to dismiss the Oregon case at the proper time and do the same to the Florida case if it is ever served. Bernath has repeatedly libeled The American Legion on his website and in court filings. We will sue for an injunction and damages at the appropriate time.

The Oregon case was essentially dismissed and fees were awarded to a number of defendants including The American Legion.
On September 18, 2014, The American Legion was served with the nonsensical 165 page purported complaint with no summons, but a one page demand to appear in 30 days by a private investigator.

We sued in Florida, where he lives. Bernath’s liability insurer settled with us and Mark Seavey. Mark paid half the attorney fees. Bernath still keeps posting on the internet. He has announced he is the “reform” candidate for national commander. We have sued him again, using his money to pay our trial lawyer. Our motions for Summary Judgement and Sanctions have been filed. We are also pursuing a judgement that Bernath is a “Vexatious Litigant.”

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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
FORT MYERS DIVISION

DANIEL BERNATH,
Plaintiff,

vs.

MARK CAMERON SEAVEY
Defendant

MARK CAMERON SEAVEY,
Counter-Plaintiff

vs.

DANIEL BERNATH
Counter-Defendant.

Bernath sued Mark Seavey, an employee, in Florida alleging many false claims. He seems to think suing an employee is actually suing The American Legion. He has also continued to misuse the emblem and make false accusations about The American Legion.

Hence, we have joined this suit. Our motions for Summary Judgement and Sanctions have been filed. We are also pursuing a judgement that Bernath is a “Vexatious Litigant.”

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
for the
Middle District of Florida

Daniel A. Bernath

Plaintiff(s)

v.

The American Legion, Don Shipley, Diane Shipley,
Extreme Seal Experience LLC, Mark Cameron
Seavey, Terrence B. Hoey, Scott Hughes, Jonn
Lilyea, Sparks

Civil Action No.

2:16-CV-596-FLM-99MEM

397
Defendant(s)
SUMMONS IN A CIVIL ACTION

On August 9, 2016, we were served with another nonsensical complaint alleging inter alia The American Legion was a terrorist organization who committed burglary, a hate crime, sexual cyber harassment, defamation, invasion of privacy and misappropriation. He desires forfeiture of real estate. It is not clear in many cases. He claims The American Legion is a citizen of Indiana and France and runs a business in Florida. He doesn’t seem to know The American Legion is a federal corporation, even though he claims to be “the reform candidate for national commander.”

We are moving to dismiss for lack of jurisdiction and improper venue. Since the complaint is sworn, we are also going for perjury. Our motions for Summary Judgment and Sanctions have been filed. We are also pursuing a judgement that Bernath is a “Vexatious Litigant.”

LYNN FLEMING  SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
Plaintiff(s),  LAW DIVISION: OCEAN COUNTY
DOCKET NO.: OCN-L-1705-15
vs.
CIVIL ACTION
THE AMERICAN LEGION;
AMERICAN LEGION POST 129  SUMMONS
RICHARD MICHAEL GATTO;
JOHN DOES 1-5 (fictitious individuals)
and ABC CORPORATIONS 1-5
(fictitious corporations),

This case was filed in June 2015. Plaintiff claims she was sexually harassed by the post commander while a waitress at New Jersey Post No. 129 while she worked for the catering company hired by the post. She further claims a hostile work environment and retaliation and reprisal along with negligence and vicarious liability.

We filed a motion to dismiss The American Legion because we do not control the post per our corporate charter. Plaintiff’s attorney has alleged our charter does not mean what it says. We have provided the legislative history to prove it does. The court has not ruled yet.

We have also filed a motion for sanctions because plaintiff’s lawyer keeps trying to insist on dropping the case “without prejudice.”

Antonio Silva and Kimberlie Silva, H/W  PHILADELPHIA COUNTY
354 Beverly Drive  COURT OF COMMON
Cliffwood Beach, NJ 07735  PLEAS LAW DIVISION

Plaintiffs  AUGUST TERM, 2015
v.  NO. 02441
American Legion, District 15 Post 311 d/b/a  JURY TRIAL DEMANDED
521 Church Street
Hawley, PA 18428
And
The American Legion
700 N. Pennsylvania St.
This is a dram shop case involving a car accident in Wayne County, Pennsylvania. The case was brought in Philadelphia because the plaintiffs’ belief the judges are more plaintiff prone and Philadelphia juries award larger judgments.

The plaintiffs have named as defendants “American Legion, District 15 Post 311” and The American Legion. They clearly do not understand the structure of The American Legion. We have filed a motion to send the case back to Wayne County and to correct a number of other defects in the complaint.

For example, the accident occurred a full 45 minutes after the defendant left the post on his 10-12 minute drive home. We do not know why the delay occurred.

I was deposed on venue and The American Legion’s Corporate Charter on January 28, 2016.

The American Legion will be filing for dismissal and/or summary judgment once the procedural defects are corrected. We are also filing for removal of the case to Wayne County, Pennsylvania. This was denied. We have asked the court to reconsider. Plaintiff has filed for new deadlines, which will probably not be final.

STATE OF INDIANA )
IN THE MARION SUPERIOR COURT 10
SS:  
COUNTY OF MARION CAUSE NO.: 49D01-1506-PL-018332

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Plaintiff,

V

STEPHENS DIRECT, INC.,

Defendant

In April 2014 Stephens and The American Legion entered into the first of a three phase agreement for digital marketing and advertising. The cost was a total of $1,450,000 for all three Phases of the campaign, payable in three installments: (1) Phase 1 of the Digital Marketing Campaign totaled $250,000, payable on April 15, 2014; (2) Phase 2 of the Digital Marketing Campaign totaled $750,000, payable on May 15, 2014, and (3) Phase 3 of the Digital Marketing Campaign totaled $450,000, payable on October 1, 2014.

Stephens’s efforts were unsuccessful. The American Legion believes Stephens breached its contract in numerous ways by failing to reasonably plan and develop its program, failing to follow industry standards, failing to make the requisite media buys and failing to deliver any appreciable increase in membership of donations.

The case was filed February 12, 2016, and is in the discovery stage with mediation to follow by May 2016. Discovery is still continuing.
Other Legal Matters

There are a number of other legal proceedings in which The American Legion has been contacted for discovery purposes, which are not part of or named in the particular cause and a number of cases are in the beginning stages but not yet filed.

The National Judge Advocate has rendered 522 written opinions on questions which have been submitted by the several Departments and/or Posts of The American Legion, National Officers, staff members and individual members of our organization. These opinions involved matters legal, such as contracts, probate matters, federal tax questions, torts, insurance matters, Articles of Incorporation, civil rights statutes, retirement benefits under the law and other matters of a legal nature; problems concerning the interpretation and construction of the National Constitution and By-Laws of The American Legion, policy matters, many of which matters required a great deal of legal research.

In each instance, when appropriate, a copy of the opinion rendered was furnished to each of the following so that they would be acquainted with the decision affecting their Department; National Executive Committee, Department Commander, Department Adjutant, and the Department Judge Advocate of the Department involved.

Many oral opinions were also rendered to the National Officers, National Commission Chairmen, to Department Officers, and to staff Directors of the national organization upon subjects involving matters legal, financial, administrative and policy.

There were 18 written opinions rendered during the year to the National Secretary of the American Legion Auxiliary, in response to queries submitted to her for determination by me.

The National Judge Advocate has also rendered oral advice on matters legal and administrative to the National Officers of the American Legion Auxiliary on many occasions during the past year.

The American Legion Magazine

The National Judge Advocate in accordance with established policy, has reviewed manuscripts of articles destined for future publication in The American Legion Magazine and The Dispatch, for the purpose of expunging statements or materials questionable in character, contained therein which might subject The American Legion to a suit in libel. To date 197 manuscripts have been reviewed and appropriate comments in connection therewith were transmitted, when necessary, to the Publisher or Editor of The American Legion Magazine.

The American Legion Retirement Plan for Employees of the National Headquarters and Subordinate Groups Thereof

In accordance with the requirements of law, The American Legion has filed all necessary returns, reports and allied documents for the calendar year 2015 with the Internal Revenue Service in connection with The American Legion Retirement Plan.

The American Legion Retirement Plan for Employees of the National Headquarters

The draft of the Plan approved at the May 2016 National Executive Committee Meeting has been completed and arrangements are being made for the distribution thereof, as required by law, as soon as execution is completed.

Employees' Salary Savings (401(K)) Plan

The trustee has changed from Mercer to Transamerica. In accordance with the provisions of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) The American Legion has filed all of the necessary Annual Return Reports and allied documents for the calendar year 2015 with the Internal Revenue Service in connection with the American Legion Employees’ Salary Savings 401(k) Plan. The office of the National Judge Advocate also reviewed the Summary Annual Report for the Employees’ Salary Savings Plan and arranged for the distribution thereof as required by law.
Parliamentary Duties

The National Judge Advocate attended the past National Convention of The American Legion and meetings of the National Executive Committee and has served both bodies in the capacity of National Parliamentarian.

Other Duties

The National Judge Advocate also functions as counsel on matters involving labor issues, real estate law, postal regulations, corporate organizations and insurance.

In addition, the National Judge Advocate functions as counsel for and a director of The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. and American Legion Charities. In these capacities, the National Judge Advocate has attended all board meetings.

Meetings of the National Retirement Committee and Salary Savings Committee

The National Judge Advocate is a member of The National Retirement Committee of National Headquarters and has attended all meetings.

He has also, in response to requests, drafted legal and other documents for the use of National Officers of the American Legion and Officers of the American Legion Auxiliary.

In conclusion, the National Judge Advocate wishes to thank all National Officers, Department Officials, and members of the National Executive Committee for the valuable assistance and cooperation extended to him during the past year.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Jeffery O. Brown, Indiana, Executive Director

The major responsibilities assigned to the executive director of The American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis are:

- Acting for the national adjutant during his absence from the National Headquarters. Performing duties assigned by the national adjutant.
- Overseeing Administrative Services, which includes the following divisions: Finance, Maintenance, The American Legion Library, and the E. A. Blackmore Museum.
- Serving on the Personnel Committee and various other committees as assigned.

The Administrative Services Division provides all secretarial assistance to the executive offices of The American Legion. Division directors’ resident at the Indianapolis National Headquarters report to the executive director, except for Human Resources and Marketing, Media & Communications, who both report to the National Adjutant.

JOHN H. GEIGER OPERATIONS CENTER (G.O.C.)

Areas of responsibility located at the Geiger Operations Center are Emblem Sales and Information Technology.

- Emblem Sales is responsible for providing logo merchandise to The American Legion Family in support of the organizations’ programs and activities, and is responsible for protecting The American Legion’s federal trademark. Emblem Sales has total annual sales in excess of $12 million.
- Information Technology (IT) is responsible for the selection and procurement of the software and hardware used by National Headquarters staff. IT maintains the telecommunications infrastructure that connects the two Indianapolis, IN offices with our facility in Washington, D.C. IT is responsible for the computer system which houses the national membership database as well as keeping this database updated with changes to the membership.
MAIL
June 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016
Incoming Letters and parcels (distributed to Divisions for processing)....1,023,310
Incoming Parcels ..................................................................................................................2,555
Outgoing Letters/Parcels (Exclusive of National Emblem Sales).........11,477,426

FREIGHT AND EXPRESS
June 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016
Out - Cartons ...................................................................................................2,723
Out - Pounds ................................................................................................ 105,368
UPS – In ..........................................................................................................1,566
UPS – Out ........................................................................................................ 5,246

LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Howard Trace, Director

The mission of The American Legion Library is to provide an information storage and retrieval system for The American Legion. Indexing of documents continues, and internal and external materials are added to the collection regularly.

The Digital Archive continues to grow at a rapid pace, with 824 items added this year, including all active resolutions back to 1969. Usage of the Digital Archive has increased by 43 percent over the previous year. Completion of our secure storage at the north end of the library will ensure better protection for our archival collection. Organization work on the photo collection included removing the remaining material in file cabinets and better organizing the uncataloged photos by subject.

Conservation work was done on the painting "American Legion Ideals" by Walter Parke and "The Two Hundredth" by John C. Duffy, both of which are on display in the Emil A. Blackmore Museum. Work included removing the dirty and yellowed varnish from the paintings, and then varnishing and inpainting, along with touch ups to the frames.

A number of researchers made extensive visits to the Library. Areas of research involved Cold War politics, post-WWII Legion membership trends, American Legion Baseball, The American Legion School Award, and Roscoe Turner.

Books, Pamphlets and The American Legion Magazine cataloged..............................1,159
Museum Collection Items Added or Assessed .............................................................. 281
Items Microfilmed ..................................................................................................... 17,112
Correspondence Written by National Historian......................................................... 485
Correspondence Written by Staff ............................................................................... 960
Prominent Legionnaire Questionnaires Sent.............................................................1,336
Prominent Legionnaire Questionnaires Received....................................................... 510

Significant Gifts to the National Headquarters Library

Donated by Suzanne Sly: 1918 United States Army Song Book
Donated by Eric Nelson, My Military History, author William Karpowicz
Donated by Dr. Robert Thune: George B. McClellan and Civil War History; American Experience: Death and the Civil War
Donated by the National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion (NADHAL): West Point 1915, author Michael E. Haskew; First to Fly, author Charles Bracelen Flood; The Three Musketeers of the Army Air Forces, author Robert O. Harder; Disciples, author Douglas Waller; 1941, author Marc Wortman
Significant Gifts to the National Headquarters Museum

Donated by Dr. Robert Thune: Abraham Lincoln presidential medal; U.S. Army bicentennial coin; 37 cent stamp commemorating the Korean War Memorial; Forever stamp commemorating Medal of Honor recipients; 32 cent stamp commemorating the Civil War (2 sets); Forever stamp commemorating Vietnam Medal of Honor recipients; American the Beautiful quarters; Presidential $1 coin and First Spouse set (2 sets); 2007 United States Mint Presidential $1 coin proof set; 2010 United States Mint Presidential $1 coin proof set; 2013 United States Mint Presidential $1 four-coin set, Denver; U.S. bicentennial stamp – sheet of 40; Lafayette stamp – sheet of 50; Veterans Stamp sales catalog; U.S. bicentennial stamp – 2 stamps; George S. Patton stamp – sheet of 50; Franklin Roosevelt stamp – sheet of 50; American Fighter Aces bronze coin (3” medal with case); General Joseph Stilwell stamp – sheet of 20; 1945 Victory at Last commemorative stamp set; Veterans and the Military on Stamps booklet; U.S. bicentennial stamp (set of 2); Honoring General George Patton stamp – sheet of 50; President Roosevelt Stamp – sheet of 50; U.S. Bicentennial Stamps – sheet of 40; Lafayette stamp – sheet of 50; The Civil War 1861-1865 book and stamps (20); Pope John Paul II bronze medal; National WWII Memorial stamp – sheet of 20; Pacific Aviation Museum Commemorative Gala Program; 1946 WWII Veterans (ruptured duck) stamp – sheet of 100; 1976 Clara Maass stamp – sheet of 40; 1975 Salem Poor stamp – sheet of 50; 2004 D-Day Gibraltar 60th Anniversary stamp – sheet of 4; 1941 WWII World at War Collectible stamp – sheet of 20; General Pershing stamp – sheet of 4; Code Talker coin and currency set.

Donated by Reinaldo Perez: American Legion History Medal and American Legion Oratory Medal


Donated by David Polick: Scrapbook and constitution of Benjamin Harrison Post 487 (IN)

Donated by James V. Lewis: Cane with American Legion emblem and Boston 1930 stenciled on cane, given in memory of Joseph J. Lewis

Donated by Robert L. Morrill: National Commander Campaign pins and buttons

Donated by Pat & Chuck Scott: Thirteen photographs of Past National Commander John McQuigg and family, 6 newspaper articles about McQuigg and the ship named after him and 3 pieces of correspondence related to the McQuigg cemetery plot and burial

Donated by Robert B. Carey: GI’s Diary of Korea and Ephemera (photographs, cards and foreign money)

Donated by Brett P. Reistad: 1922 National Convention banner, Sons of the American Legion cap, American Weekly Magazine – July 4, 1919

AMERICANISM COMMISSION
Richard W. Anderson, Connecticut, Chairman
Jill Druskis, Nebraska, Director

The Americanism Commission of The American Legion was created by a recommendation adopted by the National Convention of The American Legion held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1919. It read: “We recommend the establishment of a National Americanism Commission of The American Legion whose duty it shall be to endeavor to realize in the United States the basic ideal of this Legion of 100 percent Americanism through the planning, establishment and conduct of a continuous, constructive educational system.”

It is the objective of the Americanism Commission to translate Americanism precepts, principles and ideals in a clear and practical manner to Legion posts and other groups and individuals, including young Americans.
While the Americanism program consists of a broad, objective, general plan that features wide-range community service, better citizenship and youth development, the efforts of the Americanism Commission are educational in nature and embrace these specific objectives:

- Promote understanding of the principles of democratic governmental problems, and bringing more citizens to think seriously of the duties of citizenship;
- Give sound, practical service in our communities, working to make these communities better and safer places in which to live;
- Emphasize religion, encouraging its continuation in the life of every citizen;
- Encourage education in every possible manner, presenting school awards, sponsoring and conducting oratorical contests, cooperating with education and citizenship groups, promoting proper flag etiquette and display, and sponsoring objective youth development programs;
- Do important work for the youth of America, sponsoring American Legion Baseball, American Legion High School Oratorical Contest, American Legion Boys State, American Legion Boys Nation, American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program, American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement, Boy Scouts of America activities, and many other citizenship and objective training activities;
- Work for the assimilation of immigrants through schools of citizenship and other agencies and stand for the regulation of immigration so that this assimilation may approach perfection.

Additionally, the Americanism Commission has continued to be actively involved in legislative matters affecting our way of life. Among our legislative priorities are voluntary prayer in public buildings, bilingual education alternatives and establishing English as the official language of the United States. Two current legislative initiatives of The American Legion are: (1) the continuing efforts to effect a constitutional amendment that would give Congress the authority to enact flag Protection laws, and (2) coordinating a nationwide effort to combat the secular cleansing of our American heritage through Establishment Clause lawsuits.

This commission has the responsibility for supervision and coordination of four standing committees: Baseball Committee, Committee on Children & Youth, Committee on Youth Education and Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee.

The following is a summary of several programs, which are the responsibility of the Americanism Commission and have been conducted during the 2015-2016 American Legion program year.

**American Legion Boys State/Boys Nation**

The American Legion believes that if the United States is to maintain its form of government, it must have a citizenry that has a fundamental understanding and interest in its operation. This is what The American Legion Boys State program does for the young men of our nation. It teaches the fundamentals of American government through the state level.

It was 81 years ago that Legionnaires in the state of Illinois first recognized the need for a program that would help high school boys understand and appreciate the government they were learning about in the classroom. It was a time in the history of this nation when un-American ideas seriously threatened its future. Established in 1935, the whole idea of American Legion Boys State, then and now, is to show young people that beyond a doubt, our form of government is good; however, its preservation depends upon intelligent, informed and loyal citizens, in combination with an honest and impartial administration of government activities.

Ten years after the inception of Boys State as a program of The American Legion, the National Organization recognized the need for a similar program at the national level and
in 1946, established American Legion Boys Nation. This year, it celebrated its 70th anniversary session.

Both Boys State and Boys Nation are unique programs of The American Legion that emphasize participation and personal experience in a respective model “state” and “nation” that is complete with its governing bodies and elected officials.

Each year, nearly 20,000 young Americans take part in American Legion Boys State, and throughout its over 80-year history, the program has graduated well over 1,880,000 young men.

Every year, each Boys State selects two outstanding graduates to represent them at American Legion Boys Nation. In 2016, the program was, again, held in Washington, D.C., July 22-30, and it introduced delegates to the structure and function of the federal government first-hand.

The week of government training in the nation’s capital combines lectures and forums with visitations to federal agencies and institutions, shrines and historical points in and about Washington, D.C. Actual participation in the political process is highlighted through the week to include the organization of party conventions and the nomination and election of an American Legion Boys Nation president and vice president. In addition to federal legislators and representatives of federal agencies, American Legion officials and other leaders of national distinction participate in American Legion Boys Nation. Anighya Crocker of Springfield, Tennessee was elected President and Choteau Kammel of Omaha, Nebraska, was elected Vice President of the 2016 session of American Legion Boys Nation.

Boy Scouts of America

The American Legion charters more than 2,400 Scout units in communities across the country involving over 61,000 young people. Its commitment to the principles of Scouting dates back to the Legion's first National Convention in 1919.

The American Legion continues to support the Boy Scouts of America because of its unique ability to provide opportunities to young people for leadership training, peer fellowship, life skills development and community service.

The American Legion selected Jacob Kelley of Wisconsin, as its 2016 Eagle Scout of the Year. Selection was based on his outstanding religious, school, community and scouting achievements. He will receive a $10,000 scholarship from The American Legion.

The three runners-up are Jeremiah Lovestrand of Florida, Liam O’Conner of Delaware and Jacob Quigley of Illinois. Each will receive a $2,500 scholarship.

In addition, an estimated 8,000 certificates honoring new Eagle Scout recipients are distributed annually.

Since its inception in 2003, over 585 American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion members have received The American Legion and Scouting Square Knot award to recognize their dedication and work to assist in furthering the Scouting programs of The American Legion.

Citizenship and Naturalization

Citizenship and Naturalization efforts of Americanism include: (1) promoting grassroots involvement at the post level in understanding, appreciating and actively participating in the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and American government; (2) developing new ideas and initiatives aimed at promoting grassroots involvement at the post level in assimilating prospective citizens/legal immigrants into local communities and American society; and (3) monitoring and maintaining a portfolio of resolutions specific to the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and the assimilation and naturalization of prospective citizens/legal immigrants.

The Americanism Commission strongly urges Legion posts, districts and departments to vigorously undertake activities and collaborate with the U.S. Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services to help newly arriving legal immigrants and legal residents become
assimilated and seek citizenship. To assist with this effort, The American Legion has produced a booklet entitled *Citizenship Outreach Guide* that is available online at www.legion.org/publications.

**Eight and Forty National Lung and Respiratory Disease Nursing Scholarship Fund**

In 1956, The American Legion began administering this respiratory nursing scholarship for the Eight and Forty. At that time, the Eight and Forty was a much smaller ally, and our organization was proud to assist by administering such a vital scholarship. In 2016, the Eight and Forty developed the resources to directly administer this scholarship by themselves and into the future. The Eight and Forty expressed its gratitude to The American Legion for its efforts in sustaining the administration of the scholarship over the past fifty years.

**Flag Education**

The American Legion is a nationally recognized authority on the proper display of the United States flag. Each year, thousands of letters, phone calls and electronic mail messages are routinely answered giving factual information on the display, use of and respect for the American flag.

Late in 2015, The American Legion published *Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag* an American Legion Family Centennial “Bookazine”. Assembled in the 116-page publication are dozens of photos, graphics, illustrations, stories, voices, facts, histories and mysteries about the flag and its place in American, and global, society. The publication includes an illustrated guide to U.S. Flag Code and the story of how The American Legion became the national leader in establishing standards of respect and honor for the colors. The real story of the “Star-Spangled Banner” – from its origins in the War of 1812 to its 21st-century preservation at the Smithsonian Institute – is woven throughout the publication, as are poems, musical lyrics, unique flag-designed products and the National Anthem’s various renditions through history at major sporting events. Almost 10,000 copies of the “bookazine” were sold.

The American Legion continues distribution and sale of *For Which It Stands*, a multimedia instructional resource about the history of the flag of the United States, the significance and meaning of our flag and respecting and caring for our flag. It is intended primarily for use with students in the upper elementary and middle/junior high school grades.

Additionally, over 65,000 copies of the publication *Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette* and more than 100,000 copies of the pamphlet, *Flag of the United States -- How to Display It, How to Respect It* are distributed annually to schools, organizations and individuals. This information is sent at little or no cost to all who request it.

The American Legion continues publication of *Our Country’s Flag*, an educational comic book for use in elementary schools. Well over one million copies have been distributed since the booklet was introduced in 1988. The educational booklet, *I Pledge Allegiance*, published in May 1995, is also for use in elementary schools. *Our Country’s Veterans* was added to The American Legion’s list of educational publications in 2005.

Almost 33,400 subscribe to The American Legion Flag Alert, which provides an e-mail notification when the flag of the United States is to be displayed throughout the entire country at half-staff.

The American Legion continues its campaign to protect the United States flag from physical desecration. All 50 state legislatures have passed memorializing resolutions in support of a constitutional amendment to give Congress the authority to enact flag protection laws. Working with other organizations of The American Legion-founded Citizens Flag Alliance, The American Legion shepherded a flag protection Constitutional amendment through the House of Representatives six times in the past seven Congresses. In June of 2006, The American Legion spearheaded the drive for the amendment in the
U.S. Senate, coming within one vote of passage there. The legislation was introduced, again, in the 114th Congress.

**High School Oratorical Contest**

The American Legion has awarded over three million dollars in college scholarships since 1938 to high school students participating in its annual High School Oratorical Contest.

Each contestant must give a prepared oration on some phase of the United States Constitution, giving emphasis on the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant, taking not less than eight nor more than ten minutes for delivery. Each contestant must also give an assigned topic presentation on a constitutional topic (randomly selected during the contest from the four topics for the contest year) taking not less than three or more than five minutes for delivery.

Funds totaling $138,000 in college scholarships are available to national level contestants from each department, with the top winner receiving an $18,000 scholarship. Funds for these awards are provided by The American Legion. In addition to the scholarships awarded by the National Organization, there are scholarships awarded by intermediate organizations of The American Legion to participants in local levels of competition.

The 79th Annual National Oratorical Finals Contest was held at Indianapolis, Indiana, in April 2016 with 53 department finalists competing. The three finalists were: First place – Benjamin Crosby, Washington; second place – Solomon Brown, Mississippi; third place – Cheyenne Mathews, Alaska.

The American Legion continues to enjoy a mutually-beneficial relationship with the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA). The American Legion exhibited during the NSDA National Tournament in Salt Lake City, Utah, in June 2016. Nearly 200 elite speech and debate students and coaches provided contact information to The American Legion seeking information on the 2016-2017 Oratorical Contest. In addition, American Legion Oratorical program staff also served as a judge in the Original Oratory category at the National Contest Finals in Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Junior Shooting Sports Program**

The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program is a national Americanism program administered through post-sponsored Junior Shooting Clubs. The purpose of the program is to provide gun safety and marksmanship training for young people and to offer a wholesome recreational activity through organized competition. The Junior Shooting Sports Program has 1,447 active clubs with almost 15,000 young people participating annually.

The 26th Annual Junior Air Rifle National Championship was conducted July 19 – July 23, 2016, at the USA Shooting range facility on the campus of the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The tournament climaxed two rounds of postal matches which began shortly after the first of the year and involved 1,500 entrants.

The competition was divided into two categories: precision air rifle and sporter air rifle. Medals and plaques were awarded in both categories, as well as in each of the prone, kneeling and standing positions.

The 2016 winners were Taylor Gibson of Salem, Oregon (precision) and Emma Thompson from Freeport, Illinois (sporter). Each received scholarships totaling $5,000 from The American Legion and the Sons of The American Legion.

**Service to God and Country**

A program of fundamental Americanism, “Service to God and Country,” seeks to prevent the spiritual decay of America by charging the electorate with a spirit of
unquestionable Americanism, respect for law, reverence for authority and awareness of our human rights and freedoms.

“Service to God” emphasizes regular public worship, daily family prayer and the religious education of children, while “Service to Country” attempts to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation. These objectives are aimed at preparing young Americans to take up tomorrow’s responsibilities by teaching them moral and spiritual values, renewed interest in our Country’s history, self-discipline, self-reliance and ideals of loyalty and honesty.

Each year, a conference for the department chaplains of The American Legion is held under the direction of its National Chaplain. Program information is provided for further dissemination to district and post chaplains who coordinate the program at the local level.

**Troop and Family Support**

Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW): The American Legion Operation Comfort Warriors program supports wounded, injured and ill service members and their families during times of recovery or transition. The program fills in the voids to provide comfort and recreational items that do not show up as a line item on any military or hospital budget spreadsheet. While the care in our military hospitals and transitional units is excellent, the little things can make a big difference. OCW provides things such as loose fitting clothing to ease the pressure on a wound or pool tables and electronic dart boards to help range of motion and offer camaraderie building.

Much of the equipment donated is to empower service members to engage in positive activities that will enhance and expedite their recovery and help return them to their original duty stations or to transition home better prepared. Some of the recreational equipment donated has included bicycles, fishing gear, baseball and softball equipment, weights and resistance bands, as well as art supplies and leather crafting equipment. OCW has also help establish photography and musical therapy programs in different facilities. Our goal is to support wounded, injured or ill service members in any manner possible during their recovery process to increase their likelihood of better outcomes.

Operation Comfort Warriors staff has provided support to service members at several military and veterans medical facilities during the 2015-2016 program year, including: Bethesda Naval Hospital (MD), Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (Germany), Quantico (VA), Camp Lejeune (NC), Fort Bliss (TX), Camp Pendleton (CA), Fort Campbell (KY), Brooke Army Medical Center (TX), Navy Medical Center San Diego (CA), Baltimore VAMC (MD), Northport VAMC (NY), St. Paul VAMC (MN), Salisbury VAMC (NC) and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (MD). This is not an all-inclusive list, rather a sampling to demonstrate the outreach efforts of the program.

Family is an enormous part of the recovery process for wounded, injured and ill service members. OCW provides outings to amusement parks such as Six Flags in Fiesta, Texas where the service member is encouraged to bring their spouses or significant others and children to the outing and enjoy the day away from the hospital and recharge themselves with some fresh air and fun activities. OCW also hosts quarterly dinners in Washington D.C. in which approximately 35 patients and their families enjoy a steak dinner held at the National Press Club. Along with the steak dinner there are door prizes for the patients to show appreciation for their service and sacrifices. OCW strives to ensure that all grants provide for the needs of every applicant.

The most important detail about Operation Comfort Warriors is that 100% of all donations go to support the wounded, injured, and ill service members. All administrative, marketing and travel expenses are paid for by The American Legion, not donations. The program has received well over $3.6 million in donations and has donated well over $1.7 million so far. Items are purchased and outings planned based upon information from the facility or unit; we do not simply show up with random items. OCW staff completes extensive outreach efforts to the facilities and installations to find how we can specifically help them in their missions and support their particular programs. There are no one-size-
fits-all solutions for wounded, injured and ill service members, so there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach in our support of their service and sacrifices.

Family Support Network (FSN): Since September 11, 2001, the nation has seen National Guard and Reserve units activated in record numbers. As a result, the families of these men and women often find themselves unable to meet normal monthly household obligations. Assistance is needed for a variety of everyday tasks and expenses. These needs range from routine household chores, grocery shopping and childcare, to ensuring that the grass is mowed for the expecting mother whose husband is serving abroad.

To actively address these issues, The American Legion created the Family Support Network. Military families can request assistance by calling a nationwide toll-free telephone number, 1-800-504-4098, for service personnel and their families to call for assistance. Families can also request assistance electronically through the Legion’s website at www.legion.org/familysupport. All requests are referred to The American Legion department, or state, in which the call originated. Departments relay the collected information to a local American Legion post. The post then contacts the service member or family to see how assistance can be provided locally. Since the creation of the Family Support Network in 1990, thousands of posts have responded to meet these families’ needs.

As our forces pursue the enemies of freedom around the globe, The American Legion supports our men and women in uniform and their families with the Family Support Network. Those of us in The American Legion, who also served our nation in times of adversity, remember how it felt to be separated from those we love. The Family Support Network is successful as a direct result of Legionnaires, at the post level in communities, responding to the needs of our comrades and their families. As the nation’s largest veteran’s organization, our commitment to the men and women of our armed forces and their families is absolute and, as a grateful nation, we must ensure that no family endures hardships caused by military service that protects American ideals and freedom.

**BASEBALL COMMITTEE**

Gary Stone, Missouri, Chairman
Michael D. Buss, Iowa, Deputy Director

American Legion Baseball’s 90th World Series took place August 11-16, in Shelby, North Carolina, on Veterans Field at Keeter Stadium and was hosted by American Legion Post 82. After a tremendously successful year in 2015, ESPNU agreed to expand the live television coverage of the event to include Sunday’s Military Appreciation Day in addition to the previously broadcasted semifinals and championship. The remaining nine games were webcast live on ESPN3.

The 91st season saw 3,709 registered to play American Legion Baseball. Approximately 60,000 players, representing all 50 states and Canada, wore a Legion baseball uniform this year.

More than $7 million in sponsorship fees are spent on American Legion Baseball teams by the local posts. One million dollars is appropriated by The American Legion National Organization to conduct eight regional tournaments and the World Series of American Legion Baseball.

The 2015 George W. Rulon American Legion Baseball Player of the Year was Justin Hawkins, of Newberry, SC.

Many American Legion players have gone on to distinguish themselves in Major League Baseball and have been honored with election to the Hall of Fame. Sixty-eight Hall of Fame members played American Legion Baseball, including the 2016 inductee Mike Piazza. Other American Legion Alumni inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame include Tony Gwynn, Tom Seaver, Johnny Bench, Carl Yastrzemski, Brooks Robinson, Frank Robinson and Paul Molitor.

American Legion Baseball is instituting a national website network for its 50 departments, with the departments being able to use a similarly-branded and powerful
website template to reach their constituencies in a more efficient and mobile-friendly manner.

Over 50 percent of the Major League players and nearly 76 percent of college players competed in American Legion Baseball as teenagers. The lessons learned on the baseball diamond, such as leadership, teamwork and respect for the rules, are lessons that are learned for a lifetime.

**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & YOUTH**

*Herbert J. Petit, Jr., Louisiana, Chairman*

*Meagen L. Sweet, Indiana, Assistant Director*

The American Legion has been a staunch supporter of America’s children and youth since the organization’s founding in 1919. The young people of our nation continue to be of paramount concern to the Committee on Children & Youth, as its commitment strengthens and it seeks ways to improve the well-being of all children.

Through the decades that followed our founding, The American Legion became a strong advocate for children's rights and has remained at the forefront of the child welfare movement. The early years were devoted to progressive childcare and protection programs. Through the efforts of The American Legion and its affiliated organizations – the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion, as well as supporting independent organizations such as the Eight & Forty – many states and communities improved their own child welfare provisions.

The development of new and expanded public programs designed to provide economic security for children made it possible for our organization to turn its attention to other problems affecting young people. To date there is no area of child welfare that has gone untouched by the collective hand of The American Legion. The very program of Children & Youth itself is unique from any agency – private or governmental – in its ability to expand into every area of concern for child welfare and child health.

As stated in a 1924 resolution adopted by the National Executive Committee, The American Legion "has and will do everything possible to perpetuate 'A SQUARE DEAL FOR EVERY CHILD'." This remains our ultimate goal and the definitive challenge for the years ahead.

To attain this goal, The American Legion, in 1925, adopted the "Whole Child" plan, which states: "every child should have a home, health, education, character and opportunity." Its foundation is based on three guiding principles:

1. To strengthen the family unit against the forces of today's complex society, recognizing that the most normal environment for children is a home with their own parents;
2. To commend sound organizations and facilities that provide services for children and youth;
3. To maintain a well-rounded program that meets the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of today's young people. Stated certainly for future endeavors, this third principle has provided the flexibility to address all matters of child health and child welfare.

While these principles represent the heart of the "Whole Child" plan, the muscle depends on our four Guidelines for Action, working together:

1. **PREVENTION** – Finding solutions to obstacles before they become long-lasting problems;
2. **EDUCATION** – Providing information to our members and the general public on timely issues involving children and youth;
3. **LEGISLATION** – Maintaining knowledge of new and existing laws, needed amendments, and the administration of laws that affect young people at the national, state and local levels;
4. MATERIAL AID – Providing direct assistance in the form of cash, clothing, food and time.

During the past 98 years, The American Legion's Children & Youth Programs have contributed to significant advancements in the area of child welfare. While our list of achievements is extensive, it is by no means complete. The American Legion has and will maintain a deep, community-centered interest in children in order to find new, and perhaps presently unknown, approaches to child welfare problems. There is no way of knowing what issues will face our youth tomorrow. Our survival may well depend upon the quality of care, education and training that we, as parents and citizens, provide for all children today.

The American Legion is proud of its Legionnaires, and the members of its affiliated and supporting organizations, as well as their achievements on behalf of our nation's youth. Their efforts in the area of child welfare are a living testament to the ability of an organization of free men and women to adapt itself to evolving needs, while maintaining high principles and taking on increased responsibilities under those principles.

2015-2016 Programs

The American Legion has demonstrated a strong concern for the safety of this nation's young people since the early 1920s. In 1992, the Committee on Children & Youth designated the Child Safety program as one of its annual programs. Legion volunteers regularly disseminate information to parents, children and community leaders regarding the issue of safety. Making children safety conscious, in the home and outside, is necessary to assure that they have an opportunity to play and grow into useful adults and citizens.

As long as Halloween activities are sponsored and promoted in our various communities by duly appointed and elected officials, the Committee on Children & Youth of The American Legion believes that children and parents should know how to make this observance as safe as possible. To assist in this effort, the Committee on Children & Youth produces and distributes a brochure, “Make Halloween a Fun and Safe Night,” to educate children and parents about trick-or-treat safety.

Accidents are the leading cause of death and disability among our nation's youth. Annually, nearly 16,000 children under the age of 21 die in automobile crashes, fires, through the improper use of firearms and drowning. In homes, playgrounds and parks, the potential for serious injury is always present. To help educate the public, the Committee on Children & Youth produces and distributes “Play it Safe,” a brochure to inform parents about the six most common causes of death among children and prevention strategies.

As a major threat to the welfare of our nation’s youth, The American Legion is very concerned about youth suicide. It continues to be the third largest cause of death among 15 – 24 year-olds. The suicide rate among adolescents has grown steadily over the last four decades, quadrupling since 1960, and over 4,000 young people take their own lives every year. Suicide is a senseless tragedy but may be preventable. The Committee on Children & Youth produces and distributes a brochure entitled “Know the Warning Signs of Youth Suicide,” designed to assist youth and adults in understanding some of the warning signs and facts about suicide.

The American Legion is also mindful of the pressures facing young people today, as well as the destructive consequences of drug use. Alcohol, tobacco, inhalants and marijuana are often readily available and considered to be the entryway to a life of drug dependency and delinquency. Gateway drugs are so-called because the use of these drugs often leads to drug abuse, addiction and to the use of other drugs such as heroin, cocaine and LSD. The teenage years are challenging and pressure from peers to use drugs can be extremely intense; however, individuals are ultimately responsible for their own behavior. Decisions made today can have far-reaching effects on one’s life for years to come. To help combat this problem and educate our nation’s youth about the dangers of gateway drugs, the Committee produces and distributes a brochure titled “Gateway Drugs…Choose
not to Use.” This tool can equip parents and children with the facts of gateway drugs and help children lead a healthy lifestyle.

As sure as The American Legion is the largest veterans’ organization in the world, there are veterans’ families who require assistance. Possibly the rent is overdue or the children are hungry because a parent is sick, disabled, deceased or has deserted the family. Whatever the reason, these children become the concern of The American Legion, and the Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program is the vital tool our organization uses to help meet the maintenance and health needs of veterans’ children.

Begun in 1925 as a form of direct aid to veteran’s children, TFA remains unique in the social-work field even today and is still a very active program. During the 2015-2016 program year (June 1-May 31), in fact, the program aided 1,379 children with over $798,967 in grants. From its beginning to present, this fund has assisted veterans' families with more than $15 million in non-repayable grants.

Made possible by the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation, the TFA program is used to assist families in meeting the costs of shelter, food, utilities and medical needs when the parents are unable to do so, thereby helping to keep the child(ren) in a more stable home environment. Through TFA, a post may call upon the Committee on Children & Youth of The American Legion for cash assistance to help meet the basic needs of veterans’ children. Funds can be granted over a temporary period to eligible children when it has been determined by investigation that the child is in need and that no other sources are available, or those that are available are inadequate. It is important to note that while the veteran must have served honorably on active duty during a designated war period, the veteran does not have to be a member of The American Legion in order to receive assistance.

**Legislative Efforts**

The initiation and support of worthwhile Children & Youth legislation is one means by which the Committee on Children & Youth has attempted to accomplish its goals during the 2014-2015 program year. The following summarized resolutions are a sampling of the children & youth legislative resolutions approved at National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 26-28, 2014.

**Financially Assist Families Faced By Catastrophic Illness Of Their Children:** Res. 5-2014. It has long been our position that all children should have adequate health services to assure their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Unfortunately, many of our nation’s children are not receiving the necessary medical care due to the extreme requirements placed on the financial abilities of the average family. Consequently, children with severe catastrophic illnesses are not receiving the needed medical care. The rising cost of medical care in such cases is not covered by even the best medical policies. The American Legion believes that the state and federal governments should enact legislation to financially assist those families faced by catastrophic illness to the end that the family will not be financially devastated.

**Support Funding Comprehensive Health Care for Children & Youth Programs:** Res. 6-2014. Many of our nation’s children continue to face health needs that are not properly addressed due to the high cost of our health care delivery system. The American Legion continues to support and endorse the programs as outlined by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau as authorized under Title V of the Social Security Act and urges the Congress of the United States to continue its support by adequately funding these programs, including the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, the Healthy Start Initiative, Emergency Medical Services for Children Program and the Abstinence Education Program.

**Support Funding For All Drug Trafficking Prevention Programs:** Res. 7-2014. We realize that one of the best methods to attack the drug problem is from the demand side, but this resolution urges funding for all necessary areas and agencies that can help reduce the quantity of the substances that are being made available in this country. By working at
both ends of the problem, we can make a difference in the number of users and decrease demand.

Oppose Any Attempt to Weaken Present Laws Governing Penalties for the Production, Sale and Distribution of Pornographic or Obscene Materials to Minors: Res. 9-2014. As there have been attempts to eliminate protective laws from the criminal code regarding the production, distribution and sale of pornographic and obscene literature, The American Legion is strongly opposed to any attempt to weaken existing laws.

Support Efforts to Immunize All Children: Res. 10-2014. The American Legion realizes that in today's society there is no place for communicable disease for which there is a vaccine. Despite available vaccination programs, several childhood diseases break out annually. We believe that the state and federal governments should provide sufficient funding so that indigent families with children can receive the necessary immunizations against all communicable diseases.

Protect Children from the Unrestricted Media: Res. 11-2014. The producers of movies, television shows and news and the Internet have become very explicit in describing and depicting various types of violence. Organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, defend such actions as the author’s constitutional right of free speech without regard for the potential consequences to minor children. The American Legion supports appropriate state and federal legislation to restrict the excessive use of violence, vulgarity, and other forms of moral depravation in movies, TV programs, and TV news and on the Internet. In addition, we encourage departments and posts to conduct awareness campaigns to educate their members, their families and the general public about the potential dangers the Internet and other forms of electronic media pose to children and teenagers.

Urge The President and Congress To Establish “National Family Week”: Res. 214-2014. One of the basic principles of the children and youth program is to maintain the integrity of the family home. In today's fast-paced society, it is critical that we seek to recognize the importance of strengthening the basic unit of our country: the family. No institution can take the place of the family in giving meaning to human life and stability to our society. We urge the President and the Congress to establish National Family Week on a permanent basis during the Thanksgiving holiday week.

Urge Congress To Appropriate Sufficient Funds For School Nutrition Program: Res. 222-2014. The American Legion again reaffirms its position that the Congress of the United States and the various state legislatures be urged to appropriate sufficient funds for school nutrition programs. This is necessary to reflect the increased cost of food and to provide for needed facilities and trained personnel for the purpose of conducting an adequate school lunch program.

These are the highlights of our 2015-2016 Children & Youth legislative program. The American Legion's Committee on Children & Youth continually urges departments to support Children & Youth legislation as it relates to our national objectives. Local posts are also encouraged to support city ordinances that deal with the community's efforts to improve conditions for children and youth. The Children & Youth legislative program is a never-ending struggle, which we eagerly accept for the sake of all children.

Children & Youth Expenditures

Annually, as it has for the past 93 years, the Committee on Children & Youth records activities from The American Legion Family – nearly 14,000 posts of The American Legion, over 6,000 squadrons of The Sons of The American Legion, over 8,600 units of the American Legion Auxiliary, and hundreds of salons of the Eight and Forty. In addition, the expenditures of departments and of the National Organization are obtained for the 12-month period of June 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016, and combined with these reports (see Table No. 1).

During the reporting period, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation recorded $653,969 in donations from members of The American Legion Family and individuals
across the country. During the same period, our Temporary Financial Assistance program expended over $798,967 in grants (see Table No. 2) to 1,379 children of 593 veterans. For the 2015-2016 Children & Youth programs year, including contributions to the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, posts, squadrons, units and departments of The American Legion and its affiliated and supporting organizations reported a grand total of $17,148,928 in expenditures and contributions to benefit the children of America.

**COMMITTEE ON YOUTH EDUCATION**  
Mike Bredeck, Minnesota, Chairman  
Timothy Lankford, Indiana, Assistant Director

In May 2016, significant changes were made to enhance the viability, availability and visibility of The American Legion Legacy Scholarship. With children of fallen Post-9/11 service members remaining the top priority, The American Legion added an additional class of recipients – the children of Post-9/11 veterans assigned a disability rating of 50% or greater by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The American Legion also increased the amount of money available to award each year. By focusing the enhanced scholarship on need, qualified applicants may receive up to $20,000 in aid per year for up to six years. These awards may be used for undergraduate or graduate-level education at a nonprofit and regionally-accredited institution of higher learning. The overall goal of the enhancements are to honor those of our military who sacrificed the most for our country following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and will go into effect in 2017. In addition to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship, our scholarship programs include the American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship, Boys Nation Scholarship, Junior Shooting Sports Scholarship, Eagle Scout of the Year Scholarship, American Legion Baseball Leadership and All-Academic Team Scholarships and the Samsung American Legion Scholarship.

The newly-revised *Education Development Guide* of The American Legion made its debut in March 2016. This book is available in an interactive PDF format for download from www.legion.org/publications. This publication can also be requested in an iBook or eBook format at no charge. This publication was updated in May 2016 to include the aforementioned changes to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship and to provide additional links to resources and the latest financial information on the cost of a college education.

Sidney T. Ellington, Ph.D. (CDR, USN -Ret.) was awarded the 2016 National Education Award in recognition of his service as a career educator from the classroom to the boardroom. From his time as a senior leadership instructor as a Naval Special Warfare (SEALS) Officer to his time as classroom teacher and local education board member in Louisiana to his executive leadership positions with Teach For America and Warrior Scholar Project, Dr. Ellington exemplifies servant leadership in education and promotes the values of being a life-long learner.

During the past year, more than 25,600 students were awarded The American Legion School Award Medal. This award is designed to recognize students who demonstrate the qualities of courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship and service. The award is presented to a boy or girl upon graduation from elementary school, middle school or high school.

During 2016, The American Legion further enhanced its alliance with Samsung Electronics. Samsung extended a three-year grant to The American Legion, which allowed us to expand recognition efforts of national Samsung American Legion Scholarship winners, and develop a Samsung American Legion Scholarship alumni association. As with their original $5 million endowment in 1996, Samsung continues to believe in The American Legion’s visionary leadership for educating and growing patriotism in the youth of America.
The American Legion continues to believe that education is key to a united and informed citizenry. As such, we strive to improve our scholarships, education programs and youth development programs in a manner showing our dedication to the education of America’s youth. The promotion of Americanism to our future leaders threads throughout every American Legion scholarship and program. The resources that we provide to our Legion Family and communities at-large are specifically developed to aid in the expansion and cultivating of such values among 21st-century youth.

YOUTH CADET LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE
Larry L. Price, South Dakota, Chairman
Shayne Abrahams, Sr., Indiana, Assistant Director

The American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement (YCLE) program is an excellent vehicle through which young people may be empowered to realize early on that peace officers stand as staunch supporters for moral and legal rights, and that the dedication and impact they have within local our communities, states, and nation should be regarded with respect and appreciation. The YCLE program serves as an influential stepping stone for those high school students considering a career in law enforcement as they become familiar first-hand with professional practices and concepts of policing during a week-long program conducted at a law enforcement training academy.

There are currently nineteen departments that offer a YCLE program: Arizona; Connecticut; Delaware; Florida; Illinois; Kansas; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri; Oregon; Nebraska; North Carolina; Ohio; Pennsylvania; South Carolina; South Dakota; Vermont; and Virginia. The American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee is newly formed in order to develop strategies and methodologies for promoting the YCLE program and its growth throughout the nation, as well as working toward an ultimate goal of pursuing the development of a national capstone program – the vision is that this national capstone program would be analogous of what The American Legion Boys Nation program is to The American Legion Boys State program. Materials are available on The American Legion website at www.legion.org/youthlaw providing information for American Legion departments working with law enforcement agencies to adopt and further promote the program.

AMERICANISM COMMISSION EXECUTIVE SECTION
Richard W. Anderson, Cromwell, Connecticut – Chairman
Joseph E. Caouette, Rollinsford, New Hampshire – Chairman Emeritus
Larry L. Price, Gettysburg, South Dakota – Vice-Chairman
Robert B. Craig, Lincoln, Nebraska – Commander’s Representative
Eugene Thompson, Marseilles, Illinois – Consultant
Steve M. Tatro, Dunkirk, Maryland – Consultant
Gary Stone, Independence, Missouri – Chairman, American Legion Baseball Committee
Herbert J. Petit, Kenner, Louisiana – Chairman, Committee on Children & Youth
Mike Bredeck, Madison, Minnesota – Chairman, Committee on Youth Education
Larry L. Price, Gettysburg, South Dakota – Chairman, Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee

AMERICAN LEGION CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION, INC.
Dennis R. Boland, Florida, President
Jason R. Kees, Illinois, Executive Secretary

In 1954 The American Legion endorsed the separate incorporation of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Since then, the foundation has granted over $14.3
million dollars to other non-profit youth-serving organizations. The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation provides grants to contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children and youth and to add to progress in the child welfare field through research, studies, surveys, projects or in other ways, including but not limited to all, youth activities now or hereafter sponsored by The American Legion.

At its annual meeting in October 2015, the board of directors approved $640,395 in grants to 24 nonprofit organizations for projects to be completed in calendar year 2016. These grants were awarded to support youth-serving projects that seek to enhance the lives of children by addressing the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of children. The following is a brief summary of the grants awarded this year:

American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Grants

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Washington, D.C., was awarded $19,300 for their project, “Pediatric Outreach Training Program.” This grant will provide 500 health care professionals with information on the impact of early hearing intervention and how to assist families who choose a listening and spoken language outcome for their child.

All Children’s Hospital Foundation Johns Hopkins Medicine of St. Petersburg, Florida, was awarded $25,200 for their project, “Pragmatic Acquisition of Language Skills (P.A.L.S.) – A Therapeutic Social Skills Group.” This grant will teach social skills using the unique approach of combining social skill instruction with social thinking skills and help children navigate through any given natural situation, rather than a specific event.

Alstrom Syndrome International of Mount Desert, Maine, was awarded $16,828 for their project, “Alstrom Syndrome: Medical Management Guidelines.” This grant will provide information to families and physicians to assist in obtaining the best possible outcomes for their child and improve the outcome of treatment by facilitating the anticipation and prompt intervention of the developing pathologies typical in Alstrom Syndrome and create a more supportive environment for patients and families.

American Legion Post 133 of Fort Kent, Maine, was awarded $1,630 for their project, “Children Sharing 'Fishing Stories' with Veterans.” This grant will provide a fun-filled, wholesome day for at-risk kids, facilitate interactive sharing of experiences between children and veterans and reinforce classroom learning.

American Printing House for the Blind of Louisville, Kentucky, was awarded $31,000 for their project, “Braille Tales: Sharing the Joy of Reading.” This grant will help build an enthusiasm for reading and build sighted parents' confidence in the use of accessible reading for their child.

Autism Speaks, Inc. of New York, New York, was awarded $32,070 for their project, “The Transition Tool Kit.” This grant will be a guide for families and children on the journey from adolescence to adulthood.

Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation of Avon, Connecticut, was awarded $6,800 for their project, “Taking Care of Me: Self Care for Parents Caring for a Child with CdLS.” This grant will teach parents that their own needs must be a priority in order for them to take care of their children's needs.

Defending the Blue Line of Hastings, Minnesota, was awarded $10,000 for their project entitled, “Military Kids Scholarship Project.” This grant will provide free equipment for military kids, attendance at summer camps, special events, and financial assistance for registration fees and other costs associated with athletics.

Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Home, aka Boys Town of Boys Town, Nebraska, was awarded $34,448 for their project, “Boys Town National Hotline Teen & Parent Awareness Campaign.” This grant will fund the distribution of Hotline public service announcements to 1,100 TV stations nationwide, ensuring that more troubled teens and frustrated parents will call the hotline and speak to a trained counselor when they have nowhere else to turn.
Huntington’s Disease Society of America of New York, New York, was awarded $41,500 for their project, “Live Out Loud: A Guide to HD Advocacy.” This grant will provide the Huntington’s Disease (HD) community with a comprehensive guide to advocacy as well as a history of grassroots advocacy efforts, helping create an awareness for youth & young adult involvement in HD advocacy and the HD community.

Joe Foss Institute of Scottsdale, Arizona, was awarded $20,000 for their project, “Veterans Inspiring Patriotism in Youth.” This grant will assist children and youth by increasing their knowledge of American history, increase their understanding of civics and prepare them to become active, engaged citizens.

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation of Los Angeles, California, was awarded $39,500 for their project “The First 12 Months.” This grant will educate newly diagnosed children and their families on what to expect in the first twelve months following diagnosis of juvenile diabetes.

Kids in Danger of Chicago, Illinois, was awarded $15,000 for their project, “Safe From the Start-Safety Booklet.” This grant will fund a booklet that addresses various safety topics including safe sleep tips, choking hazards, product registration, child proofing and how to check products for recalls.

National Braille Press of Boston, Massachusetts, was awarded $24,018 for their project, “ReadBooks! Because Braille Matters.” This grant will fund free resource bags to help parents with visually impaired children to introduce their children to Braille as an effective method of reading and writing, and encourage parents to learn braille in order to help their child.

National Children’s Alliance of Washington, D.C., was awarded $60,360 for their project, “Preventing Youth-on-Youth Sexual Abuse: Recognizing & Addressing Children with SBPs.” This grant will provide Children’s Advocacy Centers and caregivers with knowledge and tools to recognize and address Children with Sexual Behavior Problems (CSBPs) and provide children’s organizations with the resources to advocate and implement CSBP-focused prevention initiatives in their own communities.

National Hemophilia Foundation of New York, New York, was awarded $17,000 for their project, “Playing It Safe For Kids.” This grant will fund a booklet that targets teens and parents of younger children, educating them on the importance of physical activity, weight maintenance and how to be active in a safe way when living with a bleeding disorder.

Organization of Autism Research of Arlington, Virginia, was awarded $19,920 for their project, “Kit for Kids Outreach 2016.” This grant will provide a set of peer education materials that teach elementary and middle school students to relate to peers with autism.

Songs of Love Foundation of Forest Hills, New York, was awarded $25,000 for their project, “Songs of Love Outreach Project.” This grant will relieve suffering and bring joy to children who are coping with a chronic disability or life-threatening illness through music.

Spina Bifida Association of Greater New England of Milford, Massachusetts, was awarded $2,000 for their project, “SBAGNE Outreach.” This grant will develop collateral relationships with ten other organizations who serve children with disabilities.

Talk About Curing Autism of Irvine, California, was awarded $27,721 for their project, “Autism Journey Guides.” This grant provide parents with information, research, peer input on where to start, what works for other families, and important next steps on treating autism with the intent of recovery.

The American Legion National Headquarters of Indianapolis, Indiana, was awarded $75,000 for their project, “Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) Program.” This grant sustains, for the child of a veteran, a safe and healthy environment, providing funds for food or clothing when assistance is essential and contributes to pre-planned health care expenses for those children.

The National Children’s Cancer Society of St. Louis, Missouri, was awarded $25,000 for their project, “Sun Day-Fun Day.” This grant will promote sun safety and give
children the opportunity to fundraise for kids their own age with cancer. The key messages of the program include: limit time in the sun, play in the shade, use sunscreen, and wear protective clothing.

ThinkFirst Foundation of Naperville, Illinois, was awarded $21,100 for their project, “Injury Prevention Reinforcement Materials.” This grant will produce injury prevention materials that reinforce ThinkFirst injury prevention presentation messaging for children and teens.

Young Marines of Washington, D.C., was awarded $50,000 for their project, “Young Marines Drug Demand Reduction.” This grant will underwrite the purchase and dissemination of anti-drug literature and promotional items.

During calendar year 2015, donations exceeded $699,724, with over $377,255 coming from the Sons of The American Legion. Members of The American Legion family are the primary contributors to the success and growth of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Each member and local organization is encouraged to make an annual contribution in support of the foundation. Your support allows CWF to continue funding projects that improve the quality of life for our nation’s children. Every dollar given to the foundation is used for grants that assist young people.

At a board of directors meeting in Indianapolis on May 1, 2016, the following officers were elected: Dennis R. Boland of Florida, president; Peggy Moon of Minnesota, vice president; Joseph J. Frank of Missouri, secretary; and Robert S. Turner of Georgia, treasurer. Administrative personnel appointed by the board were George A. Buskirk Jr., assistant treasurer, and Jason R. Kees, executive secretary.

Under the 1969 Tax Reform Act, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation retains its tax-exempt status. Gifts, therefore, are deductible for federal income tax purposes to the extent permitted by law, and bequests are deductible for federal inheritance tax purposes to the extent permitted by the Federal Tax Act.

AMERICAN LEGION ENDOWMENT FUND CORPORATION
William M. Detweiler, Louisiana, President

In 1925, World War I veterans, widows and children continued to struggle to return to a regular life. The members of The American Legion, aware of the vital responsibilities entrusted to them by those who had served, knew the time had come to take action. More than 900,000 Legionnaires, American Legion Auxiliary members and other American citizens joined the campaign, raising nearly $5 million and establishing the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation.

Since those early days, over $30 million has been distributed to disabled veterans and the children of those who served our great nation. Your gifts and donations are added to a trust that is administered by the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation. The corporation, whose members are selected by the National Executive Committee of The American Legion, takes great care to ensure that these gifts are wisely invested. Income from fund investments is then passed on to The American Legion national organization to administer programs of Children & Youth (C&Y) and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R), that include funding for the Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program, Department Service Officer school and Board of Veterans Appeals training.

During calendar year 2015, the American Legion Endowment Fund transferred trust earnings of $183,691 to The American Legion to support TFA and VA&R programs. Donations to the American Legion Endowment FundDonations during this time totaled $187,961. It is important to note that due to the structure of the fund as an endowment, only the earnings on the fund are spent, ensuring that donations will continue to support veterans and their children for generations.

At the board of directors meeting in Indianapolis on May 3, 2016, the following officers were elected: William M. Detweiler of Louisiana, president; Hon. Vincent M.
Gaughan of Illinois, vice president; David P. Rook of Indiana, treasurer. George A. Buskirk Jr. was appointed assistant treasurer.

Under the 1969 Tax Reform Act, the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation retains its tax-exempt status. Gifts, therefore, are deductible for federal income tax purposes to the extent permitted by law, and bequests are deductible for federal inheritance tax purposes to the extent permitted by the Federal Tax Act.
420


TABLE NO. 2

EXPENDITURES FROM NATIONAL TEMPORARY AID FUNDS TO DEPARTMENTS ACCORDING TO YEARS

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**Total**: $1,412,572.55

**Includes January 2012 - May 2013**

**For the Year 1926-27:** Department totals not available

**Grand Total**: $1,865,630.44
The 97th annual National Convention of The American Legion convened in Baltimore, Maryland, August 28 – September 3, 2015. National Commander, Michael D. Helm of Nebraska called the National Convention to order at 8:30AM on Tuesday, September 1, 2015, welcoming Legionnaires to Baltimore and thanking them for their continuing service to our Country and to our veterans. The 97th National Convention began with master of ceremonies, Mr. Noah Galloway, who addressed nearly 6,000 American Legion Family members on Tuesday morning. Later in the day, The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr., Governor, State of Maryland; The Honorable Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor, City of Baltimore; The Honorable Ashton Carter, Secretary of Defense; The Honorable Elijah Cummings, U.S. House of Representatives; 2014–2015 Department Commander of Maryland, Carolynn G. Baker and Clarence M. Bacon, President of the 2015 National Convention Corporation welcomed Legionnaires to the National Convention. Other guest speakers addressing the 97th National Convention of The American Legion were Cheryl A. Paschall; Assistant to United States Senator Barbara A. Mikulski; The Honorable Robert A. McDonald, Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs; The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and Jamie Warder, President, USAA Bank.

There were many highlights during the 2015 National Convention, but four events conducted at the National Convention deserve special mention. On Friday, Aug. 28 the Color Guard Contest took place and there were eight color guard units that competed in four categories. Additionally, four bands participated in the Competitive Concert Band Contest. The Patriotic Memorial Service, featuring the Texas Tenors, and the annual parade, both held on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2015, were attended by nearly 2,000 American Legion Family members. On Tuesday, Sept. 1, the National Commander’s Banquet for Distinguished Guests was held at the Baltimore Convention Center. The banquet featured the Swing Dolls as the entertainment and was attended by over 2,000 Legionnaires and guests.

CONVENTION COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

The Convention Commission conducted three regular meetings during the year. Revisions of our request for proposal (RFP) continued in 2015. This process is extremely important as it provides an equal opportunity for all cities to be judged the same way during the site visit process. It is the commission’s desire to continue to attract new cities that desire to host an American Legion National Convention, providing “blue cap” Legionnaires and their families with varied and enjoyable conventions on an annual basis.

For the 2021 National Convention, the Convention Commission reviewed bids from the following cities: Phoenix, Arizona; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Salt Lake City, Utah. Following site visits and after listening to formal presentations from each of these fine cities, the Convention Commission recommended to the National Executive Committee that Phoenix, Arizona, be awarded the 2021 National Convention for the dates of August 27 – September 2, 2021. The National Executive Committee later approved the recommendation.

Future conventions and dates:
Reno, Nevada ................................................................. Aug. 18 – 24, 2017
Minneapolis, Minnesota ............................................ Aug. 24 – 30, 2018
Indianapolis, Indiana .................................................. Aug. 23 – 29, 2019
Louisville, Kentucky .................................................. Aug. 28 – Sept. 3, 2020
Phoenix, Arizona ....................................................... Aug. 27 – Sept. 2, 2021
The primary obligation of the Finance Commission is to prepare a yearly budget for the National Executive Committee, handle funds under that budget, and exercise reasonable oversight to see that the various divisions and departments of the national organization operate within appropriations. The Finance Commission includes seven members, with the national adjutant as ex-officio secretary and the national commander and national treasurer as ex-officio members. Also attending these meetings are the executive directors of the Washington and Indianapolis offices and the finance director and liaison observers from the National Executive Committee.

The national organization had an operating deficit of $79,900 for 2015. We received $13.50 dues per member, allocating $10.50 to the General Fund and $3 to The American Legion Magazine. Income of the national organization derives from annual membership dues, interest on investments, magazine advertisements, Emblem Sales, contributions and other approved activities.

A full financial statement is incorporated in the auditor’s report, found in the 2016 National Convention Program and the 2016 Annual Report.

The National Internal Affairs Commission was established by resolution of the National Executive Committee in 1947. The original charge for this constitutional commission still remains: to formulate and recommend policies and to oversee the implementation of adopted policies relating to activities conducted for organizational purposes.

Among those purposes are all those not properly the responsibility of any other national commission, as well as membership strategies, post formation, clerical and records administration for posts and individual members and special projects. The Commission provides guidance and assistance to the National Adjutant on necessary administrative operations. Internal Affairs oversees awards, constitutional discipline and commemorative activities. The Commission also monitors legislative and other regulatory activities that potentially affect Legion posts and departments, recommending appropriate courses of action.

The Commission has six standing committees assigned to it for supervision and coordination: 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemorative Committee, 75th Anniversary of WWII Commemorative Committee, 100th Anniversary Observance Committee, American Legion Riders Advisory Committee, National Convention Resolutions Assignment, Constitution and By-Laws, and Membership & Post Activities. The latter has separate reporting responsibilities to the national convention and the National Executive Committee.

The Internal Affairs Commission also provides guidance for the following programs:

Sons of The American Legion -- For the 43rd consecutive year, the Sons of The American Legion (SAL) are at an “All Time High” in membership. The SAL closed its membership at the end of 2015 with a record 362,319 members. This number represents 1.2% increase over the previous year. A total of 35 detachments achieved 100% membership.

Membership in the SAL for 2016 is expected to surpass that of 2015 and give them another “All Time High” for 2016 prior to National Convention in August.
The SAL continues its support of several American Legion programs and is heavily involved with support to our nation’s veterans in the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services (VAVS) program. In 2015, the SAL provided over 340,126 volunteer hours in VA homes and hospitals. Donations in cash and goods to these veterans exceeded $1,249,154 nationwide. Other projects include Americanism programs of which $2,127,994 was donated along with 734,592 hours of service. These are remarkable results considering only 20% of the Squadrons submitted reports. In 2015, the Sons have raised over $360,510 for the Child Welfare Foundation and provided numerous grants through The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Since 1987, the SAL has contributed over six million dollars to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation.

The Sons continue to support Legion programs with a major emphasis on VAVS, National Emergency Fund and the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund in addition to other vital programs. As a major program and an integral part of The American Legion family, the Sons continue to serve and provide assistance to posts and their communities.

**The American Legion Riders** – The National Executive Committee established The American Legion Riders (ALR) as a national program in October 2007 to be supported and administered by posts and departments. The American Legion Riders National Advisory Committee is responsible for advising the national leadership on resolutions before the Internal Affairs Commission and to act as sources of information for departments and posts on matters pertaining to Legion Riders. This committee also provides significant guidance for the planning and execution of The American Legion Legacy Run each year. Of particular importance to the committee is the establishment of program protocols adhering to federal rules regarding The American Legion’s trademarks and proper supervision provided to the ALR programs by the posts.

Members of the American Legion Riders National Advisory Committee also serve as liaisons within six national regions to provide information and support to departments and posts.

The Riders raise money for many charitable causes, most notably for children and youth programs and for wounded or returned servicemen and women. Since 2006, the annual American Legion Legacy Run has conducted ten major cross-country, multi-day motorcycle runs totaling over 14,000 miles and collecting over $6M for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship trust program with 2015 being the most in donations of $1.4 million.

**The American Legion Amateur Radio Club** - The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC) has been conducting national nets, special event operations, and membership activities since 2011. Members in local post “ham” radio clubs support local emergency management agencies, law enforcement and fire departments, and FEMA in emergency communications “when all else fails.”

Nearly 3,000 American Legion family members with FCC ham radio licenses have joined TALARC. Our own flagship station K9TAL located in the basement of the American Legion National Headquarters has inspired the formation of sister stations K5TAL (Gautier, Mississippi Post 1992), K6TAL (Palm Springs, California Post 519), W6TAL (Redlands, California Post 106), AA8AL (Belle Valley, Ohio Post 641), KM4MND (Loganville, GA Post 233), WL7CXW (Anchorage, Alaska Post 104), WB4TAL (Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina Post 116), KG7TQX (Washougal, Washington Post 122), and K7HLR (Clearfield, UT Post 139). Other posts and departments have expressed strong interest in developing local post radio clubs and emergency radio teams.

Special emphasis of TALARC is placed on local, regional, and national amateur radio emergency communications in support of the National Emergency Fund (NEF) and American Legion post and department support operations before, during, and after natural or man-made disasters and terrorist attacks. The American Legion has maintained a standing statement of affiliation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) since 2006.
**National Emergency Fund** -- From January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015, The American Legion provided $34,700 in grant monies to Legion and SAL members, as well as $9,000 to American Legion posts. During the same period, the National Emergency Fund received donations totaling $333,417.

Every dollar contributed to the fund is used for rendering financial assistance to those that qualify who have incurred devastation from a declared natural disaster. The grants are to be used for immediate needs – lodging, food and clothing – and not as a substitute for insurance. In order to qualify, members must have been displaced or evacuated from their primary place of residence and be a member in good standing at the time of loss. Monies to support the administrative costs of maintaining this fund and to conduct fundraising are absorbed through existing budget areas.

The National Emergency Fund is unique and members know they can turn to The American Legion for immediate financial assistance, without payback. Through the generosity of Legion and Sons of The American Legion members, the National Emergency Fund will continue to meet the needs of our Legion family in the aftermath of local, state and national weather related disasters.

**Consolidated Post Reports** -- The Consolidated Post Report was established in 1975 in order to assist departments in the documentation of the various activities a specific post has done during the twelve-month reporting period, June 1st through May 31st. During the 2015-2016 reporting year, sixty-seven percent of posts reported some activity.

Throughout the reporting year American Legion post members volunteered 807,786 hours in assisting veterans at VA Hospitals; donated $3,081,567 in emergency aid; 45,658 Legionnaires gave over 75,399 pints of blood; events covered through different media outlets totaled 138,180; performed 122,068 funeral honors at a cost of $2,691,883; sponsored 1,966 American Legion baseball teams at a cost of $5,571,530; Legion posts sponsored 2,012 Boy Scout packs for a cost of $1,738,831; through various school assisted programs they spend $5,502,778; presented 29,960 American flags at a cost of $283,253; performed 4,046,682 community service hours while spending $3,399,077 in support of those activities; and all other donations to Family Support Network, Cancer Research, United Way, Legion Endowment Fund, Children’s Hospitals, National Emergency Fund, Special Olympics, Temporary Financial Assistance, Children & Youth Programs and other various activities totaled $21,078,214.

**The National American Legion College**-- Each November, the National American Legion College (NALC) hosts many talented young Legionnaires at the National Headquarters in Indianapolis for a week of intensive training. These students return to their departments with enhanced knowledge and appreciation for The American Legion. They are taught the core values and contributions of the organization and are challenged to think critically and creatively about issues confronting The American Legion.

Candidates for the NALC must be veterans who served during the Lebanon/Grenada era or later, with demonstrated potential for higher leadership roles. Student candidates are nominated by their respective departments and rank ordered by a selection committee. In 2015 we had 55 students attend the National American Legion College.

Graduates are making a difference in leadership roles and membership teams across the country. Many have already been appointed to department and national level positions while others are used in various leadership and teaching roles within their respective departments.

Since the National American Legion College was reinstated in 1998, we have graduated 785 Legionnaires ready to assume leadership at various levels.

**Leadership Education and Development Training**-- The American Legion’s national organization exists to support its individual members, their families, all veterans and service members, and their communities. The functions at the national level – including membership, communications, training, finance, archives and legal support – serve as foundations for the volunteer leadership. Since “membership in The American Legion is membership in the National Organization of The American Legion by affiliation with
posts,” it is essential that members fully understand the programs and practices of The American Legion.

To help educate and provide support for departments, counties, districts and local posts, national headquarters staff has organized and coordinated the Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program. In 2015, we provided training in 15 departments. The program is a one-day, eight-hour training session designed to provide instruction to departments, county, district and post members. Department leaders are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

There are twenty-six modules from which the departments may choose any combination that totals at least eight hours of instruction. National staff experts cover a wide range of topics relevant to the operations of The American Legion. All training can be conducted in conjunction with current planned department functions such as winter/spring/fall, district, county or department conferences and conventions. A cap/lapel pin is presented to each participant that has completed, at the minimum, eight hours of LEAD training.

**NATIONAL CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS ASSIGNMENT COMMITTEE**

Henry P. Bradley, Massachusetts, Chairman

The Resolutions Assignment Committee meets at least three days before the convening of the national convention. This committee has the responsibility to receive, consider and transmit all resolutions – with or without recommendation – to the appropriate convention committee for a report to the convention. During an average year, between 200 and 300 resolutions will be assigned.

**CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS COMMITTEE**

Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman

The National Constitution and By-laws of The American Legion can only be amended by the duly elected delegates at a national convention. However, the Constitution & By-Laws Committee, established by the authority of the National Executive Committee in 1939, authorizes this committee to study and make proper recommendations concerning all of the matters that pertain to the constitution and by-laws, as well as matters relating to the Uniform Code of Procedure, which provides rules and regulations for the revocation, cancellation or suspension of department and post charters of The American Legion.

**MEMBERSHIP & POST ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE**

Kenneth E. Orrock, South Dakota, Chairman
Billy R. Johnson, Georgia, Membership Director

Membership and programs go hand in hand to making The American Legion an organization able to provide people and resources to serve the needs of veterans and their families. Membership & Post Activities is pleased to report a continuing membership of over 2 million members worldwide.

- Membership - Final 2014 membership – 2,208,651
- Final 2015 membership – 2,135,965
- Final 2016 membership – 2,039,981

**53rd Annual National Membership Workshop** -- The 53rd Annual National Membership Workshop convened in Indianapolis on July 28-30, 2016, with more than 300 department and district officers from nearly all 50 departments in attendance.

Many who attended already had a good understanding of The American Legion’s membership program, especially as it pertains to their departments and districts. When the
workshop concluded, they are prepared to face day-to-day membership challenges with a better understanding of the Legion as it relates to potential members.

The goal of the workshop is to provide these essential membership workers with the tools, knowledge and desire to serve The American Legion’s membership. Whether they are involved in recruitment or program implementation, the workshop teaches veterans to help veterans and provide communities the essential programs to maintain a quality of life for which all veterans fought and served to preserve.

**New Post Development/Revitalization** -- The Membership & Post Activities Committee developed a training program in January 1996 designed to assist posts, districts and departments in developing and revitalizing posts. The program provides training workshops to interested volunteers, along with practical, hands on field application.

The success of the program is evident, based on the revitalization and development of more than 4,000 American Legion posts in the past 20 years. Many departments have succeeded in revitalizing posts without any direct assistance from National Headquarters staff. Whether departments request field assistance or just send members to the training workshop, positive results follow if they adhere to the guidelines established.

**LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION**

**Brett Reistad, Virginia, Chairman**

This report covers activities of the Legislative Commission from August 16, 2015 through August 15, 2016. During this period, the Commission met two (2) times to review the legislative program and to make recommendations to the National Executive Committee. Reports of these meetings are contained in the published proceedings of the National Executive Committee.

**Purpose, Personnel and Organization**

The Legislative Commission represents The American Legion before the Congress of the United States on all legislative matters in which The American Legion is officially interested. The Commission also assists the National Executive Committee in formulating an appropriate legislative program for each session of Congress. The Commission consists of 35 members and 5 National Executive Committee liaisons.

To further assist the Commission in its work, the National Executive Committee created the National Legislative Council in 1975, composed of Legionnaires whose judgment and advice are respected by their Members of Congress. There is one council member for each Member of Congress. A Council Chairman heads the Council, and is assisted by a Vice Chairman in each Department. The Chairman, Vice Chairmen and general membership of the Council are appointed by the National Commander upon recommendation by the Departments.

The professional staff of the Commission (the Legislative Division) concentrates on implementing the legislative mandates of The American Legion; these mandates are expressed in resolutions adopted at the annual National Convention and by the National Executive Committee at each of its regularly scheduled meetings. The Legislative Division is located in Washington, DC and consists of the director, a deputy director, two assistant directors, an assistant director/grassroots coordinator, two administrative assistants, and a research analyst. The director, deputy director, and assistant directors are registered lobbyists and submit semi-annual lobbying reports to Congress, in addition the Legion submits quarterly reports on legislation which our organization lobbies Congress. Because The American Legion is a federally chartered organization, an annual report is also prepared and submitted to Congress.

**114th Congress, 1st Session**

The Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) appropriations process ground to a halt, when the deadline for passage of the 12 appropriations bills to fund federal programs – October 1,
2015 – passed. The House had passed 6 of the 12 spending bills, while the Senate had passed only one.

Since none of the appropriations bills were enacted by the end of September, a continuing resolution was needed to keep the federal government running. A total of three continuing resolutions kept the federal government operating from October 1 through December 22, 2015. Final funding for FY16 was approved by Congress in mid-December, with the House approving the measure by a 316-113 vote on December 18, and the Senate passing the bill the same day by a 65-33 vote. It was signed into law the same day as Public Law (PL) 114-113.

The American Legion participated in 41 congressional hearings during the First Session.

AMERICANISM

On December 18, 2015, the House passed the omnibus appropriations measure for FY16 by a vote of 316-113. A few hours later, the Senate approved the measure by a 65-33 recorded vote. The bill was signed into law by the President later that day, as PL 114-113.

This new law contains $1.15 trillion in funding for all federal government programs, including the Departments of Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), Labor (DOL), and Veterans Affairs (VA).

Under the provisions of PL 114-113, Department of Justice programs received $28.7 billion in funding for the remainder of the fiscal year (which ends on September 30, 2016). Specific areas of interest to The American Legion include:

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI):** The FBI received $8.8 billion for this year, an increase of $362 million over FY15.
- **Immigration Courts:** The legislation increased funding for Immigration Courts to $427 million. The increase will support an additional 55 immigration judge teams to expedite removal proceedings.
- **U.S. Marshals Service:** This agency received $1.2 billion for FY16.
- **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA):** $2.4 billion was tabbed for this agency, an increase of $558 million above FY15.
- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF):** The legislation contains $1.2 billion for ATF.
- **Juvenile Justice Grants:** One program area that has been a primary Legion concern since 1974 is the account for juvenile justice grants, which totals $270 million for FY16. These grants address such concerns as child abuse, youth gangs and violence against children, missing/exploited children, and underage drinking.

NATIONAL SECURITY

On November 25, 2015, the President enacted PL 114-92, the FY16 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Budget highlights which interest The American Legion include: $521.9 billion in base discretionary spending and $58.8 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).

Provisions affecting servicemembers, veterans, and retirees include:

- **Troop Pay & Allowances:** Military pay increase is 1.3 percent; pay freeze for generals and admirals.
- **Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH):** Slows the rate of increase to the BAH, phases it in over five years (2015-2019). It also adds $300 million to the budget for slower implementation.
- **Combating Sexual Assault in the Military:** Improvements include: a) victims be notified of their right to Special Victim’s Counsel prior to questioning by law enforcement, b) DOD establishing minimum training standards and performance
measures for SVCs, c) DOD must enhance sexual assault prevention for male victims in the Armed Forces, and d) DOD must develop a strategy to deal with retaliation against those who report or intervene on behalf of victims.

- **Commissaries**: Rejects administration proposal to reduce the commissary subsidy and reduction of store hours, added $281.2 million to continue current policies.

Other provisions of interest to the Legion include the following:

- **A-10 Ground-Attack Aircraft**: Adds $388.5 million for continued operations of the A-10 Thunderbolt II (aka “Warthog”) ground-attack aircraft. The administration had pushed to mothball the entire fleet of these airplanes. But the enthusiastic endorsements of the soldiers and Marines have persuaded Members of Congress to keep the A-10 in operation.

- **F/A-18E/F and F-35B Joint Strike Fighters**: Adds $978.8 million for 12 additional F/A-18E/Fs, and $846 million for 6 F-35Bs for the Marine Corps.

- **Shipbuilding Programs**: Adds $1.03 billion, primarily to accelerate or increase work on six shipbuilding programs.

Under the provisions of PL 114-113, the *Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2016* – signed by the President on December 18, 2015 – military construction accounts received a total of $8.2 billion, an increase of $1.4 billion over the previous year. This amount included $1.4 billion for family housing projects, with another $607 million slated for military medical treatment facilities. It further appropriated $551 million for the construction or alterations of Guard and Reserve facilities, and $334 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at ten DOD Education Activities facilities in the U.S. and overseas.

Other provisions in the law address Department of Defense funding for FY16. Defense appropriations included $514.1 billion in the base budget and $58.6 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations. Defense spending includes:

- **Military Personnel and Pay**: $129.2 billion for military personnel and pay accounts, including a 1.3 percent pay raise for all uniformed personnel. The funding is $1.2 billion above FY15.

- **Operation and Maintenance**: $167.5 billion ($5.8 billion above the previous year). This category also includes $263.3 million for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs, and an additional $25 million to continue expansion of the Sexual Assault Victims’ Counsel program to all military services.

- **Procurement**: $111 billion, $17 billion over the enacted 2015 level.

- **Research and Development**: $69.8 billion; $6.1 billion above the previous year’s levels.

- **Health**: $32.3 billion for DOD health and family programs. Overall, the legislation included increased funding for cancer research, as well as traumatic brain injury and psychological health research and suicide prevention outreach programs.

FY 2016 funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was also a part of PL 114-113. A total of $41 billion were appropriated, an increase of $1.3 billion compared to FY15. Some of the accounts which interest The American Legion are:

- **Customs & Border Protection (CBP)**: $11 billion, an increase of $359 million over last year’s amount.

- **Coast Guard**: $10.8 billion, which is $933 million above the previous fiscal year’s funding.

- **Disaster Relief**: Funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) totaled $7.4 billion. This included $2.5 billion for first responder grants; and $1.5 billion for state and local grants, amounts equal to the previous year’s amounts.
• **Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE):** The law provided $5.8 billion for ICE. Among ICE’s areas of responsibility are human trafficking, child exploitation, cyber-crime, and drug smuggling. The bill also fully funded E-Verify, a program that helps companies check if their employees may legally work in this country.

• **Transportation Security Agency (TSA):** $4.9 billion. This included funding for security enforcement, cargo inspections, intelligence functions, and increases for canine detention teams and privatized screening operations.

• **Secret Service:** $1.9 billion. The bill increased funding for cybersecurity investigations, rejected the President’s proposed cuts to critical Secret Service staffing, and continued funding for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children which the President proposed to zero out.

The measure also includes a prohibition on the transfer or release of detainees from Guantanamo Bay.

**VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION**

On October 15, 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), which is the measure of increases or decreases in the Cost of Living, was lower than last year. This meant there would be no COLA increases in 2016 for those receiving Military Retired Pay, VA payments, Social Security benefits, and Federal Government civilian pensions. The drop in the CPI was largely attributed to a 23 percent drop in gas prices. There was no COLA in 2010 or 2011, also because of an insufficient increase in CPI, and some market analysts believe that 2016 may also yield no increase.

Under the provisions of PL 114-113, the *Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2016* – signed by the President on December 18, 2015 – the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received a total of $162.7 billion, with discretionary funding totaling $71.4 billion, an increase of $6.4 billion above the FY 2015 level. Included in the discretionary funding accounts are:

• **VA Medical Services** – $50 billion, $4.7 billion above last year’s enacted level. Individual accounts which interest The American Legion include: $7.5 billion in mental health care services; $6.7 billion in homeless veterans treatment services, housing, and job training; $1.5 billion for Hepatitis C treatment; $605 million for family caregivers of seriously injured veterans; $232 million for traumatic brain injury treatments and therapies; $270 million in rural health initiatives; and, $144 million in suicide prevention programs.

• **Medical and Prosthetic Research** – The new law provided $631 million for this account, an increase of $42 million over the previous year’s funding.

• **Advance Appropriations for All Veterans Programs for FY17** – $165.8 billion. Discretionary medical programs will be funded in 2017 at $63.3 billion. In addition, mandatory programs will be funded at $102.5 billion. This was done to eliminate the possibility that VA programs would go unfunded in case of a government shutdown.

• **National Cemetery Administration** – $271 million for its operations, $14 million more than FY15.

• **Information Technology (IT)** – $4.1 billion, an increase of $230 million.

• **Disability Claims Processing** – $2.7 billion to address the burgeoning claims backlog. This amount is an increase of $10 million over the President’s request and $173 million above the 2015 enacted amount. This funding will support 770 additional staff to tackle claims and appeals work, $141 million for digital scanning of claims; and $26 million for centralized mail. Funding for the Board of Veterans Appeals was increased by $11 million to a total of $110 million, to address the looming appeals backlog.
- **Construction** – Major construction funding totaled $1.2 billion, $100 million more than the budget request, and $862 million above the 2015 amount. Funds will be used for correcting critical seismic deficiencies, new hospital and clinic construction, and repairing crumbling infrastructure in some of VA’s oldest structures. Minor construction is set at $406 million.

- **Construction Grants** – The state extended care facilities account will receive $120 million (an increase of $30 million), with the state cemeteries programs being assigned $46 million. Both of these programs have been essentially flat-lined for a number of years; The American Legion has urged Congress to make substantial increases in both grant accounts.

**VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION**

On October 16, 2015, President Obama signed PL 114-68, the *Border Jobs for Veterans Act*. The Senate had passed the measure on October 1, 2015 by unanimous consent. The House had previously approved the bill by a vote of 410-0.

The law requires the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) division to “actively recruit” military veterans who are separating from service. The legislation is needed, according to the bill, because an “estimated 250,000 to 300,000 members of the Armed Forces separate from military service every year.” At the same time, CBP is seeking officers to help it perform its mission, including meeting the congressionally-funded staffing target of 23,775 officers for fiscal year 2015.

Senate supporters also said in a prior statement that the CBP is still seeking to fill nearly 1,200 of the 2,000 new officer positions established by Congress in 2014 to improve security at the nation's ports. DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said the hiring shortfall is associated with applicant background investigations, low polygraph clearance rates, and a shortage of federal polygraph examiners, and is combined with CBP officers leaving the agency.

The *Border Jobs for Veterans Act* of 2015 will:

- Direct DHS to identify (using the Department of Defense (DOD) Military Occupational Specialty Codes, Air Force Specialty Codes, Naval Enlisted Classifications and Officer Designators, and Coast Guard Competencies) that are transferable to the requirements and duties assigned to CBP Officers, and to consider hiring qualified candidates who are eligible for veterans recruitment appointment.

- Direct DHS and DOD to establish a program to actively recruit servicemembers who are separating from service to serve as CBP Officers. This program will include provision of CBP Officer opportunities in relevant job assistance efforts under the Transition Assistance Program; to place CBP officials, or other relevant DHS officials, at recruiting events and jobs fairs involving separating servicemembers; to provide opportunities for local CBP field offices to partner with military bases; to conduct educational outreach to qualified servicemembers to CBP Officer requirements; to work cooperatively to identify shared activities and opportunities for reciprocity related to steps in hiring CBP officers with the goal of minimizing the time required to hire qualified applicants; to work cooperatively to ensure the streamlined interagency transfer of relevant background investigations and security clearances; and to ensure separating servicemembers are aware of opportunities to fill CBP Officer vacancies.

On December 18, 2015, President Obama enacted the *Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act*. The law extends and modifies the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) through December 31, 2019, a five year extension. The *PATH Act* language was included in the text of the omnibus continuing appropriation for FY16 (PL 114-113). The American Legion has been a longtime supporter of WOTC.

The consolidated appropriations bill for FY16 – PL 114-113 – included funding for the Department of Labor, specifically for the Veterans Employment and Training Service
Spending for VETS totaled $271.1 million. Funding for individual VETS accounts includes:

- **Jobs for Veterans State Grants** received $175 million, which fund Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veteran Employment Representative (LVER) personal;
- **Federal Administrative Costs** were funded at $40.5 million;
- **Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs** received $38.1 million;
- **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)** was funded at $14.1 million; and,
- **National Veterans’ Employment and Training Services Institute (NVTI)** received $3.4 million for its operations, which includes the training of DVOPs and LVERs.

### 114th Congress, 2nd Session

The Second Session of the 114th Congress convened on January 4, 2016. Major issues on the agenda for both chambers revolved mainly around fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations for the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA). To date, The American Legion has participated in twenty-one congressional hearings during the Second Session.

#### AMERICANISM

Since its introduction last year, House Joint Resolution (HJ Res) 9 – flag protection legislation – has failed to garner a great deal of support in the 114th Congress. Since being assigned to the House Judiciary Committee, no hearings have been held. The measure has 40 cosponsors. A companion measure, Senate Joint Resolution (SJ Res) 21, was introduced late in July, 2015. That measure currently boasts 9 cosponsors. The American Legion will continue to seek passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag because it is the right thing to do. Let “We the People” decide.

On April 21, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S 2837, legislation to fund Department of Justice (DOJ) programs for FY17. The House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the bill, HR 5393, on May 24. Both measures would provide $29 billion for DOJ programs. DOJ programs which concern The American Legion include:

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**: The FBI would receive $9.4 billion for FY17 in the Senate bill, $9.1 billion in the House version;
- **U.S. Marshals Service**: This agency would receive $2.71 billion for FY17 in the Senate bill, $2.73 billion in the House version;
- **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)**: $2.49 billion is tabbed for this agency in the Senate measure, $2.1 billion from the House;
- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)**: The legislation contains $1.26 billion for ATF in the Senate version, $1.3 billion in the House bill;
- **Juvenile Justice Grants**: One program area that has been a primary Legion concern since 1974 is the account for juvenile justice grants, which the Senate measure pegged at $272 million for FY17, but only $184 million in the House bill. These grants address such concerns as child abuse, youth gangs and violence against children, missing / exploited children, and underage drinking;
- **Immigration Courts**: The Senate legislation sets funding for Immigration Courts at $426 million, while the House measure would provide $457 million. The funds will support the hiring of additional immigration judge teams to expedite removal proceedings; and,
- **Drug Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts**: Both measures would fund these innovative panels at $49 million for the upcoming fiscal year.
INTERNAL AFFAIRS

On January 26, 2016, the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission, an independent panel, announced the winning design for a memorial to honor the World War I generation in the nation’s capital.

The winning design – “The Weight of Sacrifice” by Joseph Weishaar, 25, a 2013 University of Arkansas graduate who now works in Chicago, and New York-based sculptor Sabin Howard – was selected from a field of five finalists in an international competition that drew more than 350 entries.

The proposed site for the World War I Memorial is Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets N.W. in Washington DC. It is one block from the White House with a clear view down Pennsylvania Avenue of the U.S. Capitol. Located in the park is a statue of General of the Armies John J. Pershing – the leader of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I.

The winning design retains the statue of Pershing but completely changes the park landscape, adding bronze sculptures and walls etched with quotations and likenesses of those who served. Much of the memorial will remain as green space, including a lawn containing 116,516 cubic feet of soil – one foot for each American who died – numerous trees and park space.

The World War One Centennial Commission was established by the World War One Centennial Commission Act, part of PL 112-272, passed by the 112th Congress and signed by President Barack Obama January 16, 2013. The commission is responsible for planning, developing, and executing programs, projects, and activities to commemorate the centennial of the First World War; including encouraging private organizations and state and local governments to organize and participate in commemorative activities; facilitating and coordinating activities throughout the United States relating to the centennial; serving as a clearinghouse for the collection and dissemination of information about events and plans for the centennial; and developing recommendations for Congress and the president for commemorating the centennial. As an organization founded by World War One veterans, The American Legion appoints one commissioner to the Centennial Commission.

The commission hopes to complete construction of the memorial in time for the 100th anniversary of end of the First World War, November 11, 2018.

NATIONAL SECURITY

On May 19, the House of Representatives by a vote of 295-129 approved HR 4974, the FY17 Military Construction and Department of Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies spending bill. On April 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a companion measure, S 2806. A total of $7.9 billion in overall military construction is contained in the measure, $282 million more than the administration’s request. Some highlights include:

- **Military Family Housing**: Both bills provide $1.27 billion to fund construction, operation and maintenance of military family housing for FY17. This is $44 million below the budget request. The funding will ensure quality housing is sustained for all 1.4 military families currently served by the program.

- **Military Medical Facilities**: Both measures include $304 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities, a decrease of $303 million below the FY16 enacted level. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad.

- **DOD Education Facilities**: Both measures include $246 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at four DOD Education Activities facilities located within the U.S.

- **Guard and Reserve**: The bills include $673 million for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities, an increase of $122 million over the FY16 enacted level.
- **NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP):** Both versions provide $178 million – $43 million above FY16 – for infrastructure necessary for wartime, crisis, and peace support and deterrence operations, and training requirements. The funds will support responses to the challenges posed by Russia and to the risks and threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa.

On May 17, the House Appropriations Committee approved by a voice vote HR 5293, legislation to fund Department of Defense (DOD) programs for FY17 at $517.1 billion, an increase of $3 billion over current year funding. On May 26, the Senate Appropriations Committee – by a vote of 30-0 – passed its version of the same measure, S 3000. The Senate bill would fund DOD programs at $515.9 billion. Among the programs addressed were:

- $173.7 billion for **Operation and Maintenance** in the House version, $170.7 billion in the Senate bill. This funding supports key readiness programs to prepare our troops for combat and peacetime missions, including flight time and battle training, equipment and facility maintenance, and base operations;
- $128.2 billion for **Military Personnel** and pay in the House bill, $127.9 billion in the Senate version. This would provide for 1.31 million Active Duty and 826,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel in the House measure, 1.28 million Active Duty and 801,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel in the Senate bill;
- $104.2 billion for **Equipment Procurement** in the House measure, while the Senate bill would provide $105.2 billion. These funds support our nation’s military readiness by providing the necessary platforms, weapons, and other equipment our military needs to train, maintain the force, and conduct successful operations;
- $70.3 billion for **Research and Development** in the House bill, $70.8 billion in the Senate measure, for research, development, testing, and evaluation of new defense technologies;
- $58.6 billion for **Overseas Contingency Operations** in both versions, and,
- $33.6 billion for **Defense Health and Military Family Programs** in the House bill, $34 billion in the Senate version, to provide care for our troops, military families, and military retirees.

On May 26, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S 3001, the FY17 funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by a vote of 30-0. A total of $48.07 billion would be assigned to the various programs of this agency, $245 million above the FY16 funding level. The House Appropriations Committee passed its version of the bill, HR 5634 on June 22, providing $41.1 billion for DHS programs, $432 million more than the President’s funding request. Some of the major accounts which interest The American Legion are:

- **Customs & Border Protection (CBP):** $11.2 billion, about $125 million above this year’s amount, in both bills. This funding will allow nearly 21,370 Border Patrol agents and 23,775 CBP officers.
- **Coast Guard:** $10.4 billion, which was nearly $292 million above current year’s funding in the Senate measure, $10.3 billion in the House bill.
- **Disaster Relief:** Funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) totals $11.39 billion in the Senate measure, $7.3 billion in the House version. This includes $2.57 billion for first responder grants.
- **Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE):** Both measures provide $5.96 billion for ICE, $132 million above FY16 levels. Among ICE’s areas of responsibility are human trafficking, child exploitation, cyber-crime, and drug smuggling. The bill also fully funds E-Verify, a program that helps companies check if their employees may legally work in this country.
• **Transportation Security Agency (TSA):** $5.08 billion in the Senate measure, $7.6 billion in the House bill. Included is funding for security enforcement, cargo inspections, intelligence, increases for canine detention teams, and privatized screening operations. It also includes funding for an additional 1,344 TSA personnel.

• **Secret Service:** $1.9 billion in both bills. These bills increase funding for cybersecurity investigations, rejects the President’s proposed cuts to critical Secret Service staffing, and continues funding for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children which the President proposed to zero out.

Neither chamber has acted on its funding measure for DHS.

On December 15, 2015, Rep. Mike Coffman (CO) introduced HR 4251, the **Guard and Reserve Equal Access to Health Act**. The American Legion-initiated bill was based upon the legislative mandate in Resolution 182, which requires the Department of Defense to provide end-of-service physical examinations to all retiring and separating servicemembers within 90 days of the end of their military service. If passed, the bill will ensure servicemembers of the Guard and Reserve obtain an end-of-service physical at the completion of their military service. Today, reservists and active-duty military are required to complete a physical examination when they enter the military. But under current law, only active-duty servicemembers are required to complete an end-of-service physical. Providing reserve component servicemembers with an end-of-service physical will document those health conditions that may be service connected to determine eligibility for VA health care. The end-of-service health records will also help expedite the disability compensation claims process for these veterans.

When he introduced the bill, Rep. Coffman, a Marine Corps combat veteran who was mobilized and deployed twice to the Middle East, said, "These reservists are often deployed and endure many of the hardships of war….citizen soldiers deserve the same consideration as their active-duty counterparts when they transition out of the military and this legislation is a further step in that direction." He serves on the House Armed Services and the House Veterans’ Affairs committees, where he is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. He is the only member of Congress to have served in both Iraq wars. Since the introduction of this legislation, the Legislative Division staff have held face-to-face meetings with Members of Congress and their congressional staff, seeking additional cosponsors and support for passage of the bill.

As of July 19, the bill has 37 cosponsors, but is stuck in the House Armed Services Committee. There have been no hearings or roll call votes related to this bill.

A recent estimate from the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Congressional Budget Office stated that HR 5458, the **Veterans TRICARE Choice Act** (a bill that would allow military retirees to opt out of TRICARE and contribute to a tax-advantaged employer-sponsored health savings account (HSA)), would decrease government revenues by $97 million over ten years. The change in revenue would stem partly from the impact on Social Security payroll taxes for those who decide to put their TRICARE coverage on hold and opt into an HSA for a time. The estimate concluded, however, that the effects on direct spending and appropriations would be insignificant between 2017 and 2026.

Under current law, TRICARE enrollees cannot contribute to HSAs, which may result in current and former servicemembers losing out on the HSA benefit available to non-TRICARE employees. The problem occurs after having retired from military service. Those individuals who begin employment outside of the military may become eligible for HSA health insurance coverage through their new employer. HSA contributions from employers are not subject to income and wage taxes, and accountholders are not taxed on HSA balance earnings. Without the opportunity to opt out of TRICARE, a veteran is automatically excluded from being able to look at a High Deductible Health Insurance Plan and HSA as an option, even if it is the best option for them at the time.

HR 5458 would allow retired servicemembers or current members of the Reserves or National Guard to freeze and unfreeze their TRICARE eligibility to take advantage of
HSAs by amending Title 10 and the Internal Revenue Code. The legislation, which would not apply to active-duty servicemembers, would allow veterans to opt back into TRICARE during the open enrollment season under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

**VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION**

On May 19, the House of Representatives, by a 295-129 recorded vote, approved HR 4974, a bill to fund VA operations for FY17, at $176.9 billion, $14.2 billion above the current year’s funding amounts. Discretionary programs will receive $74.4 billion, including $63.3 billion in advance appropriations for VA medical care accounts approved last year.

On April 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S. 2806, that panel’s version of the House bill. This measure funds VA operations at $177.4 billion, an increase of $14.7 billion above the FY16 level. The major funding areas include:

**VA Medical Services:** These accounts will be funded at $52.8 billion by the House and $65 billion by the Senate, allowing between 7 and 9.2 million patients to be treated. Specific programs and funding include: $7.9 billion in mental health care services; $7.3 billion in homeless veterans treatment, services, housing, and job training; $173 million in suicide prevention programs; and $250 million in rural health initiatives. The House bill also provides an additional $1.1 billion in FY17 funding to address health care needs like hepatitis C long-term care for veterans, support care for caregivers of veterans, and to fight homelessness among veterans and their families.

**FY18 Advance Appropriations:** Both measures contain $66.4 billion in advance appropriations for VA medical care in FY18. It also includes $103.9 billion in advance funding for VA mandatory benefits programs.

**Disability Claims Processing Backlog:** A total of $2.9 billion is earmarked for the processing of claims, which is a $148 million increase over the current fiscal year in the House measure. The Board of Veterans Appeals would receive $156 million – a $46 million increase – will support 242 new staff to tackle claims appeals. The Senate funding figure for claims processing is $3.0 billion.

**VA Electronic Health Record:** Both bills contain $260 million for the modernization of the VA electronic health record system. It also contains language restricting funding until VA has certified interoperability of the system with DOD.

Other accounts in the measure which interest The American Legion include:

- $75 million for the American Battle Monument Commission (ABMC) in both bills;
- $31 million for the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in both measures;
- $71 million for Arlington National Cemetery in both versions; and,
- $64 million for operations, maintenance, and the capital plan for the Armed Forces Retirement Home are contained in both bills.

On June 30, the President enacted the *Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act* (PL 114-188), after the bill passed the House of Representatives by unanimous consent on June 21. VA researchers found women veterans are six times as likely as non-veteran women to commit suicide. Women veterans ages 18-29, many of whom served in Iraq and Afghanistan, are twelve times as likely. Congress acted to address this crisis.

The bill directs the department to identify VA mental health care and suicide prevention programs that are most effective for women veterans, and such programs with the highest satisfaction rates among women veterans.

On July 5, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (FL) introduced HR 5620, the *VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act of 2016*. The bill would strengthen protections for whistleblowers and help fix, what Chairman Miller thinks is the VA’s biggest problem – its pervasive lack of accountability for misbehaving employees. Additionally, the bill would reform the department’s disability benefits appeals process – a top priority for VA leaders and many veterans service organizations, including The American Legion. Specifically, the bill would:
• Shorten the firing/demotion/appeals process for rank-and-file VA employees from more than a year on average to no more than 77 days;
• Remove entirely the Merit Systems Protection Board from the firing/demotion/appeals process for VA senior executives;
• Provide VA whistleblowers with a means to solve problems at the lowest level possible, while offering them protection from reprisals and mandating strict accountability for those who reprise against them;
• Give the VA secretary the authority to recoup bonuses and relocation expenses from misbehaving employees;
• Give the VA Secretary the authority to reduce the pensions of senior executives convicted of felonies that influenced their job performance; and,
• Reform the department’s broken disability benefits appeals process.

In his introductory remarks, Chairman Miller stated, “The biggest obstacle standing in the way of VA reform is the department’s pervasive lack of accountability among employees at all levels. Until this problem is fixed once and for all, long-term efforts to reform VA are doomed to fail. For too long, union bosses, administration officials and their enablers have used every trick in the book to help VA bureaucrats who can’t or won’t do their jobs remain firmly entrenched in the agency’s bureaucracy. The VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act of 2016 gets rid of these loopholes, which have been unfairly forcing veterans and the many good VA workers to deal with deadwood employees for years. Union bosses and defenders of the broken status quo will oppose this bill, and that is exactly why it must become law.”

On July 8, the House passed by a vote of 407-5 the conference report for S 524, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. The Senate on July 13 voted 92-2 to approve the measure. It was signed by President Obama on July 22 as PL 114-198. The law contains numerous provisions to combat increasing rates of opioid drug abuse, including through modifications to prescribing and pain management practices, by creating or modifying programs to expand access to treatment, particularly access to opioid overdose reversal drugs or medication-assisted treatment that eases withdrawal symptoms, and by establishing or strengthening specific programs for vulnerable groups such as drug-addicted infants. It also requires VA to take several actions to better manage and track the use of opioids by veterans.

The new law requires VA to more closely track opioid use by veterans within the VA health care system and to expand its opioid safety initiative to all VA medical facilities. It also requires VA and DOD to jointly update their opioid therapy clinical practice guidelines. It includes several provisions dealing with general VA health care, including those that seek to expand access through the use of wellness-based programs to complement pain management services, that promote the use of VA patient advocate representatives, and that require expanded background checks when hiring VA medical providers. It also limits the amount that can be spent on VA bonuses for employees in future years.

On July 22, the President enacted PL 114-197, the Veterans Comprehensive COLA Act of 2016. This measure directs VA to increase, as of December 1, 2016, the rates of veterans’ disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. Each such increase shall be the same percentage as the increase in benefits provided under title II (Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance [OASDI]) of the Social Security Act, on the same effective date.

On July 29, President Obama signed PL 114-218, the Department of Veterans Affairs Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2016. This measure requires the VA Secretary to establish and administer a dental insurance plan for veterans, and survivors and dependents of veterans. The dental insurance plan under this law shall provide such benefits for dental care and treatment as the Secretary considers appropriate for the dental insurance plan,
including diagnostic services, preventative services, endodontics and other restorative services, surgical services, and emergency services. Enrollment into the plan is voluntary.

**VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION**

On March 31, 2016, the President enacted PL 114-142, the *Foreclosure Relief and Extension for Servicemembers Act of 2015*. This new law extends one of the provisions of PL 112-154, the *Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012*. It would extend through 2017 the one-year period after a servicemember's military service during which: (1) a court may stay proceedings to enforce an obligation on real or personal property owned by the servicemember before such military service; and (2) any sale, foreclosure, or seizure of such property shall be invalid without a court order or waiver agreement signed by the servicemember. The extended one-year period under PL 112-154 expired on December 31, 2015, and returned to a nine-month period under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act.

On June 9, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S 3040, a bill to fund the Department of Labor’s Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) programs for FY17. Under this measure, VETS would receive $274.5 million, an increase of $3.4 million over current year funding amounts. The House Appropriations Committee approved its bill, HR 5926, on July 14, allocating $285.5 million for VETS programs. Funding for individual accounts includes:

- $175 million for Jobs for Veterans state grants, which fund DVOP and LVER personnel in both versions;
- $41 million for federal administrative costs in the Senate bill, $42.5 million in the House version;
- $40.5 million in the Senate measure to fund the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs, $50 million in the House version;
- $14.6 million in both bills to carry out the Transition Assistance Program (TAP); and,
- $3.4 million to fund the operations of the National Veterans’ Employment and Training Services Institute (NVTI) are contained in both measures.

President Obama on July 6 signed PL 114-189. This legislation provides funding to the Army Corps of Engineers to hire veterans and members of the Armed Forces to assist that agency with curation and historic preservation activities.

The Army Corps of Engineers, among its other responsibilities, is to preserve and catalogue artifacts and other items of national historical significance that are uncovered during the course of their work. In 2009, the Corps of Engineers, initiated the Veterans’ Curation Program to employ and train Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in archaeological processing.

The Veterans’ Curation Program employs veterans and members of the Armed Forces in the sorting, cleaning, and cataloguing of artifacts managed by the Corps of Engineers. Employees of the Veterans’ Curation Program gain valuable work skills, including computer database management, records management, photographic and scanning techniques, computer software proficiency, vocabulary and writing skills, and interpersonal communication skills, as well as knowledge and training in archaeology and history.

Since 2009, a total of 241 veterans have participated in the Veterans’ Curation Program, including the current class of 38 participants. Of the 203 graduates of the program, 87 percent have received permanent employment in a field related to training received under the program or chosen to continue their education.
MARKETING COMMISSION
Kenneth D. Danilson, Iowa, Chairman
R. Jeffrey Stoffer, Indiana, Director

The American Legion Marketing Commission was formed in October 2015 to strategize and execute the organization’s activities to promote membership growth, strengthen the fundraising program, maximize merchandising opportunities, nurture corporate alliances and achieve greater brand awareness. In its first year, the commission also oversaw multiple initiatives to better integrate marketing efforts executed by all divisions and to provide professional support for departments, districts, counties and posts.

Critical to the first-year effort has been the development of digital media infrastructure that aims to improve the user experience for those who wish to learn about The American Legion, join, donate, buy merchandise, engage in corporate alliances and participate in programs.

A new American Legion national website design and architecture was installed in April 2016 to stimulate visitation and access via mobile devices. That effort produced a 74.3 percent increase in visitation in the month of July alone, year over year, and a jump from 7 percent to 34 percent of access to legion.org via mobile devices. Increases in online joining and renewal were reflective of the visitation growth. The new infrastructure is designed in such a way that departments, districts, counties and posts can replicate it to better synergize the user experience and to improve brand cohesion at every level. A pilot project to develop a department and local version of the architecture is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2016. A similar effort is under way to standardize the MyLegion.org platform, a members-only area of the national digital media program that includes membership administration.

Along with the development of new architecture and user interface has come the creation of an integrated database of American Legion registered web users. This effort includes the migration of more than 200,000 data files into one cloud base so that visitors can receive tailored messaging based on their interests and behavior and log on for web services using just one user name and password.

As these developments have occurred, the commission has overseen day-to-day performance in key areas of the organization’s business, including membership, fundraising, corporate relationships, merchandising and branding. Tactical highlights under those headings are as follows:

Membership
National staff, with guidance and support from outside agencies and the Membership & Post Activities Division, developed a one-stop membership platform on Legion.org, eliminating outdated content and setting plans for new materials to ease the work of local recruiters and convert site visitors into members. Through this effort, and in collaboration with the national Membership & Post Activities Committee, the staff has begun development of several new membership promotional tools for delivery in print and digital media at every level. New membership recruitment training videos and materials are also in production.

The commission oversees the organization’s national Direct Membership Solicitation (DMS) program and exceeded the budgeted target for 2016 by signing up 111,105 new and re-enlisted members (those whose memberships had expired). The new DMS marketing campaign is now under way with a target of 122,000. Another service managed under the Marketing Commission’s guidance is the Direct Renewal program – mailings of dues notices to members and the delivery of member benefits promotions.

Fundraising
A shift in the business model on department fundraising – where National Headquarters conducts all or some of a department’s fundraising functions – turned a $36,000 deficit in this area into a $190,000 net positive return between 2015 and 2016. The
key shift that occurred is the splitting of fundraising revenues after an agreed-upon target is exceeded, as negotiated between national and the departments.

The national fundraising program, designed to grow a database of donors from outside the general American Legion membership, produced $1.7 million in net revenue for 2015 and is on schedule to exceed that by the end of 2016. The donor file now stands at approximately 350,000, and efforts are under way to compensate American Legion departments whose members contribute to the national program at the same time they are receiving offers to give from department fundraising programs.

A new planned giving platform was developed by staff and contracted agencies to provide opportunities for memorial bequests and other estate gifts. A brochure to promote planned giving was produced in May, and the new platform went live in late August.

**Corporate Relationships**

The member discount provider program was overhauled in early 2016 to require a minimum $25,000 annual commitment from participating companies. The change ensures that those companies which provide member discounts also market them to members through American Legion media and other opportunities, such as convention presence.

As new corporate relationships have been negotiated, development of existing relationships with USAA, AbbVie and Walgreen’s has been cultivated. Relationships with multiple other potential corporate alliances are now in development, including Harley-Davidson and the Discovery Channel, which conducted a special event at the kickoff to the 2016 Legacy Run to raise scholarship funds for children of military personnel who died on duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and those who sustained 50-percent or greater service-related disabilities since the war on terrorism began.

**Merchandising**

The American Legion Emblem Committee reports to the Marketing Commission and documented $8.59 million in sales through the first seven months of 2016, down slightly for the same period in 2015. The American Legion Flag Rewards Program, meanwhile, continues to grow. Participants are awarded credits for flag purchases through Emblem Sales. More than 1,500 American Legion posts participate in the program, which has seen a 3 percent sales increase year to date in 2016, through June 30. Total sales amounted to $1,514,000 over that period through the program, including revenues of $109,400 through email marketing alone.

**Brand Awareness**

The American Legion National Headquarters has developed a team of staff members and agencies to improve brand awareness through high-profile events, such as The Legacy Run, Salute to Heroes Inaugural Ball, National Convention, American Legion Baseball World Series and major Veterans Day parades in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as the 500 Festival Parade in Indianapolis.

Media attention to these and other American Legion activities has been cultivated through multiple alerts, personal contact with media outlets and message-point strategies for national participants at the events. Staff and agencies have supported improved engagement with outside media.

The American Legion Marketing Commission is now working with staff and agencies to establish long-term strategic plans to deliver an effective, cohesive and best-in-class marketing program that maintains the integrity of the organization and its legacy while applying the most modern tools of communication.
EMBLEM SALES COMMITTEE
Alvan T. Fuller, Massachusetts, Chairman
Richard B. Keith, Indiana, Director

The American Legion emblem is the exclusive property of the National Headquarters. The sale of the emblem, emblem pins, merchandise carrying the emblem and other items of organizational equipment is the responsibility of the National Headquarters in Indianapolis. The following tables show gross sales, net earnings, etc., for the entire calendar year 2015 and for the first six months of 2016.

January 1 to December 31, 2015
(12 months)

Gross Sales .......................................................... $13,171,323
Cost of Goods Sold ................................................ 7,149,275
Overhead ............................................................. 3,922,191
Operating Profit .................................................. 2,099,857

Total number of 2015 orders processed was ................. 113,076

January 1 to June 30, 2016
(6 months)

Gross Sales .......................................................... $ 7,580,800
Cost of Goods Sold ................................................ 4,067,222
Overhead ............................................................. 2,223,459
Operating Profit .................................................. 1,290,119

Total orders processed for first six months of 2016 was ............ 63,150

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Walter Ivie, Texas, Chairman
R. Jeffrey Stoffer, Indiana, Director

The American Legion Media & Communications Commission oversees the majority of print and digital media products and channels delivered from National Headquarters. The commission also has oversight of the organization’s media outreach program, including press conferences, appearances in national news and media alerts. It also provides support for key marketing initiatives and corporate relationships.

The flagship of the program is The American Legion Magazine, the nation’s best read and most widely circulated veterans magazine, according to an independent audit. With a circulation of 2 million households and a readership exceeding 3.2 million, The American Legion Magazine ranks No. 1 in readership frequency, according to a survey by researcher GfK MRI. That means subscribers have read four out of the last four or three out of the last four issues more often than readers of all other U.S. magazines. Its content is general interest, driven by the organization’s main areas of engagement – patriotism, defense, veterans, children and youth, national and international affairs.

The media area of the Marketing, Media & Communications Division draws most of its revenue from advertising sales into the magazine. In 2015, the year-end sales figure was $9,981,114, or 92.9 percent of total advertising revenue. The bulk of the remainder of the division’s operating revenue comes from a $3 per member allocation.

The division’s media channels and assets include:
• **Print.** This category includes *The American Legion Magazine*; *The American Legion Dispatch* (monthly leadership newsletter); *The American Legion Annual Report*; *The American Legion National Convention Guide*; the National Commander’s Testimony to Congress; brochures and internal documents and additional print media as assigned from national leadership, including event programs; and other specialty products such as Our Pillars, Your Platforms, which is published during each presidential election year. Additionally, the division fulfills editing and designing needs of 200 brochures and documents associated with other National Headquarters divisions.

• **Media outreach.** The division is responsible for promoting the organization’s programs, messages and priorities to outside media and key stakeholders. This includes the writing and distribution of press releases; regular engagement with national broadcast, print and web media producers; the development and delivery of media events and press conferences; timely alerts and audience quantification.

• **Web.** The American Legion national website at www.legion.org is the nation’s most-visited veterans web platform and serves as a gateway to virtually all American Legion media products and channels. The site, which receives between 400,000 and 600,000 unique visitors per month, offers news, videos and photography; transactional engagement through donations, membership and merchandising; entrance to special-interest microsites on such topics as the 100th Anniversary of The American Legion and Legiontown USA, where veterans are invited to fulfill their own content and share it; *The American Legion Online Extension Institute* training module; and the Burn Pit blog site, to name a few. Legion.org is also the entry point to the organization’s interactive and transactional platform supporting American Legion Baseball. The American Legion’s video vault, called LegionTV, also houses all of the organization’s video content in one microsite.

• **E-mail.** The division produces a portfolio of popular e-newsletters, led by the weekly American Legion Online Update, which reaches more than 630,000 subscribers every Thursday with links to the top stories of the week on the Legion.org platform. Another e-newsletter with nearly as many subscribers is the National Commander’s Message, which goes out twice monthly, typically to promote a particular subject or interest. The Online Update and the National Commander’s Message receive open rates of over 30 percent on a frequent basis — a rate far above the industry standard. Other e-newsletters include Honor and Remembrance, Flag Alert, The American Legion Riders, Legislative Update, The American Legion Baseball Dugout, The American Legion Career Center and The American Legion Centennial. Each newsletter has an open rate that far exceeds the industry standard.

• **Social.** The American Legion has a fast-growing network of social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest. The Legion’s Facebook community now has approximately 99,200 in its audience, and the national Twitter following is approximately 63,500.

• **Mobile.** The American Legion’s mobile audience grew rapidly over the past 18 months, now representing roughly 34 percent of page views, as compared to 12 percent a year ago. Division staff redesigned the mobile site this year to make it more user-friendly for our growing audience.

• **Smartphone apps:** The American Legion Media & Communications Division has produced and developed five smartphone mobile apps, including a general American Legion app introduced in 2014 that already has nearly 20,500 downloads; an American Legion Claims Coach app to help in the VA benefits process; which has about 15,000 downloads; an American Legion World Series app, which generated more than 7,300 downloads; along with a National Convention app and a Sons of The American Legion app.
The American Legion Media & Communications Division produces a variety of physical displays, including parade floats, plaques, convention booths and other forms of physical media for the organization.

**100th Anniversary.** The American Legion Media & Communications Division is deeply involved in the organization’s centennial program, including organizational structure, merchandising, promotion, media products and general support.

**Internal communication groups.** The division has been actively engaged with two communication groups that help promote Legion activities and programs. The National American Legion Press Association (NALPA) is made up of Legion Family members who are responsible for public relations at the department or post level. Division staff members provide training and resources to these members so they can efficiently and effectively promote the Legion in their communities. Staff also support The American Legion Amateur Radio Club (TALARC). These amateur ham radio operators interact with others inside and outside the Legion, and provide critical communication support in times of emergencies or natural disasters.

The goal of this integrated approach to American Legion media is to maximize efficiencies, resources and talents to deliver the organization’s message in a well-branded, effective strategy that aims to improve internal and external awareness, generate membership, inform visitors, stimulate interactions and ease transactions. These tools are used for veterans outreach, which includes promoting the many values, programs and interests of The American Legion.

Overall, the media and communications program is built to replicate and represent the values and interests of The American Legion, from the individual member to the local post to the state department to the national headquarters, internal and external, and beyond.

**NATIONAL SECURITY COMMISSION**

G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman
Rhonda Powell, Alabama, Director

At 9:00 a.m., Sunday, August 30, 2015, 258 delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security initially met in the Baltimore Convention Center, Rooms 340-342, Level 300. Mr. G. Michael Schlee (Maryland) was elected Chairman and Mr. E.C. Toppin (North Carolina) was appointed Secretary.

After the initial meeting, the following convention committees met, held elections and dealt with the resolutions assigned to them:

- **Aerospace**
  - Roger Webster (MI), Chairman
  - Anthony Heath (MA), Secretary

- **Conventional Armed Forces**
  - Charles E. Kruger (MN), Chairman
  - Kent Webber (DC), Secretary

- **Foreign Relations**
  - Randall Fisher (KY), Chairman
  - Robert Bryant (KY), Secretary

- **Law and Order & Homeland Security**
  - George Wehrli (FL), Chairman
  - James Chapman (VA), Secretary

- **Military Benefits & Quality of Life**
  - Melvin Smullen (MD), Chairman
  - Nola Maloney (FR), Secretary

- **National Guard and Reserve Forces**
  - William Goede (MN), Chairman
At 11:00 a.m., Sunday, August 30, 2015, the delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on Security reconvened in the Baltimore Convention Center, Rooms 340-342, Level 300. Reports of all Convention Committees were read and their recommended actions on resolutions considered. A total of 25 resolutions were assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security or prepared by the Committee to meet issues which were held to be of concern to The American Legion and germane to its principles and objectives. The Convention Committee authorized the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report of the Convention Committee on National Security on behalf of its delegates and make technical and administrative corrections to the resolutions reported out of the Committee.

AEROSPACE
Roger Webster, Michigan, Chairman

APPROVED

Resolution No. 81:
Subject: Support For Public And Private Manned Space Exploration
Origin: New Mexico

WHEREAS, that the space shuttle program was discontinued in 2004, and NASA’S and the United States is falling behind in space manned space exploration; and
WHEREAS, The Lunar Exploration Program Constellation was dismantled by President Obama; and
WHEREAS, The United States of America astronauts currently have to depend on foreign spacecraft and Russian, Soyuz spacecraft to transport them to the international space station (ISS); and
WHEREAS, The United States is losing technological, engineering, mathematical and scientific advantage over many foreign countries in aerospace, i.e.: Russia, China and Japan; and
WHEREAS, Manned deep space exploration has been nonexistent since the Apollo missions in 1975; and
WHEREAS, The United States is paying the Russian government 80 million dollars for every U.S. astronaut that is sent to the (ISS), international space station at present time; and
WHEREAS, The Orion project will be a manned rocket mission into deep space to Mars and beyond into deep space; and
WHEREAS, United States technology, science, mathematics, physics, chemistry and the discovery of the unknowns of space will be in the forefront of mankind; and
WHEREAS, Mars will be at its closest distance to Earth (this is known as opposition), when the earth is at aphelion, (the furthest point from the Sun) and Mars is at perihelion, (the closest to the Sun) on the 27th of July, 2018. The distance will be 35.8 million miles. With relative negative and positive distances related as time and distance before and after this date; and
WHEREAS, As stated by astronaut John Glenn, “The most important thing we can do is inspire young minds and to advance, the kind of science, math and technology education that will help you youngsters to take us to the next phase of space travel; now, therefore be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion shall endorse
and support policies and legislation approved by the Aerospace Committee; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That the United States of America resume its quest for manned space travel to Mars and deep space travel be fully funded and supported by congress for NASA, to include the Orion Crew Vehicle, the SLS Space Launch System and the ISS International Space Station, and private space programs to include Space X, Red Dragon (Mars concept), Dragon lab, Falcon 9, Merlin, Kestrel and Draco rocket programs.

CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES
Charles E. Kruger, Minnesota, Chairman

APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 35
SUBJECT: NATIONAL DEFENSE BUDGET
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, The American Legion views a strong national defense as paramount to national security; and

WHEREAS, Army Secretary John M. McHugh and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno appeared before the House Committee on Appropriations subcommittee on defense on March 26, 2015 to urge Congress to prevent the return of funding caps imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act, also known as sequestration; and

WHEREAS, Secretary McHugh stated, “As we face extreme instability around the world, we must have certainty here at home. Your soldiers deserve no less. We must have an end to sequestration this year, and we must have this budget”; and

WHEREAS, Gen. Odierno stated, “If BCA (Budget Control Act) caps (also known as sequestration) remain, we can no longer execute the defense strategic guidance. The decisions we make today and over the next several months will impact our nation for the next 10 years.”; and

WHEREAS, Not only do the spending cuts downsize the force structure, but also reduce service members pay and benefits, which could potentially lead to the loss of highly trained men and women; and

WHEREAS, While the Department of Defense is content on shrinking the size and scope of the United States military, our major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rouge nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urge Congress to oppose the pending budget cuts in military spending proposed by the Department of Defense; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress not allow our military forces to reach a weakened state in these uncertain and perilous times.

RESOLUTION NO. 68
SUBJECT: PRISIONER OF WAR STATUS FOR PATRICK O. FORD
Origin: Missouri

WHEREAS, Legionnaire Patricia Ford Ivey having appeared before Bennett & Dennis Herrick Memorial American Legion Post 626 and offered testimony and evidence not previously seen to enlist our help in getting her Uncle Patrick O. Ford's cause of death verified as at the hands of the enemy while being a Prisoner of War; and

WHEREAS, Petty Officer Ford was serving as an aft machine gunner on River Patrol Boat (PBR) 750 which was ambushed from shore during a two boat combat patrol by a Viet Cong force using rockets and heavy machine guns on 21 June 1968, disabling his craft and sending it drifting directly toward the enemy position; and
WHEREAS, Records received by Petty Officer Fords family have multiple causes of death to include drowning and machine gun fire at the time of PBR-750's ambush on 21 June 1968, and list him as Missing in Action from that date until 25 June 1968 when his body was recovered; and

WHEREAS, Legionnaire Ivey has been conduction interviews with Sailors that served with P.O. Ford that insist he made it to shore in order to provide covering fire before being captured by Viet Cong forces and subsequently tortured over several days and killed; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That the National American Legion to support the change of status for the period of 21 June 1968 to 25 June 1968 from MIA to POW for Patrick O. Ford. Gunners Mate Second Class, United State Navy.

RESOLUTION NO. 69
SUBJECT: MEDAL OF HONOR FOR PATRICK O. FORD
Origin: Missouri

WHEREAS, Legionnaire Patricia Ford Ivey having appeared before Bennett & Dennis Herrick Memorial American Legion Post 626 and offered testimony and evidence not previously seen to enlist our help in getting her Uncle Patrick O. Ford's Navy Cross upgraded to The Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, Petty Officer Ford was serving as an aft machine gunner on River Patrol Boat (PBR) 750 which was ambushed from shore during a two boat combat patrol by a Viet Cong force using rockets and heavy machine guns on 21 June 1968, disabling his craft and sending it drifting directly toward the enemy position; and

WHEREAS, Although seriously wounded P.O. Ford returned a continuous volume of fire into the Viet Cong position until he realized the condition of his craft and crew at which time, in the face of point-blank enemy fire, and with his clothing on fire he assisted three of his more seriously wounded shipmates into the water to be picked up by the second boat; and

WHEREAS, P.O. Ford did not leave PBR-750 until he ensured there were no more survivors and when he did he took his M-60 machine gun with him and went away from rescue and towards the enemy, providing covering fire even while seriously wounded while the second boat retrieved the survivors from the water until he ran out of ammunition and was captured by the enemy, tortured and killed; and

WHEREAS, A review of The Congressional Medal of Honor Society's records show that out of 16 Medal of Honors awarded to Navy personnel in Vietnam between 1965 and 1972 half of these were officers, of the enlisted men two were awarded the Medal of Honor for saving the lives of officers, four were Corpsmen assigned to the Marine Corp, one was a construction engineer assigned to an SF Group (Army), and one, a Petty Officer First Class was serving as a Boat Commander and Patrol Leader; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That the National American Legion supports the upgrade of the Navy Cross to the Medal of Honor for Patrick O. Ford, Gunners Mate Second Class, United States Navy.

RESOLUTION NO. 79
SUBJECT: MEDAL OF HONOR FOR DORIE MILLER
Origin: Illinois

WHEREAS, Dorie Miller Post 915, The American Legion, Department of Illinois, is an organization of wartime veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation and also dedicated to building a proper monument to honor Navy seaman Doris "Dorie" Miller; and

WHEREAS, Doris "Dorie" Miller, a U.S. Navy messman aboard the USS West Virginia when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, without any formal training in
naval gunnery, after pulling a wounded officer and several of his fellow shipmates to safety, manned an anti-aircraft machine gun and shot down four enemy planes while damaging several others; for this action Dorie Miller, for his heroic effort, was awarded the Navy Cross by Admiral Chester Nimitz; and

WHEREAS, Seaman Miller later served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Liscome Bay and was killed in action in December 1943 in the South Pacific; Dorie Miller was one of the first heroes of WWII and his heroism, in part, helped the movement to desegregate the Armed Forces by proving that African Americans were suitable for combat duty; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That the American Legion urge Congress to award the nation's highest military honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously, to Dorie Miller, United States Navy; and that the nation fully acknowledge his distinguished devotion to duty, extreme courage and the total disregard of his own safety during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

RECEIVE AND RECORD

RESOLUTION NO. 53
SUBJECT: COLD WAR SERVICE RIBBON
Origin: New York

FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
Randall Fisher, Kentucky, Chairman

APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 38
SUBJECT: TAIWAN DEFENSE ARMS SALES
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, The Republic of China, also known as Taiwan, is a long-time friend having fought with the United States against Japanese Imperialism during World War II and against communism during the post-war period; and

WHEREAS, The Republic of China is a major trading partner and democratic ally of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is strategically located and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Asia-Pacific region; and

WHEREAS, Under the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8), the United States is committed to provide defense equipment and defense services, in such quantities that the Government of the Republic of China may maintain a sufficient self-defense capability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion supports the sales of the latest American weapon systems, including naval vessels, submarines, military aircraft, high-tech electronics, communications equipment and air-defense missile systems to Republic of China of such quality and in such quantities so as to enable the Government of the Republic of China to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports the continued sales of sophisticated U.S. weapon systems, including, but not limited to, F-16 fighter aircraft, anti-submarine equipment and torpedoes, anti-aircraft/anti-missile systems, and electronics and communications equipment to Republic of China; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Government of the Republic of China be given preferential pricing for these items but not equal to that given to the U.S. government, to enable the Republic of China to purchase sufficient quantities of these items for their defense needs.
RESOLUTION NO.  40
SUBJECT: SOUTH CHINA SEA ISLAND BUILDING
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, In the last 18 months, China has constructed more new island surface than all other nations have constructed throughout history and unlike other claimants, China has—at least briefly—placed military equipment on one of its artificial islands; and

WHEREAS, The South China Sea is international water and sovereignty in the area should be determined by the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS); and

WHEREAS, UNCLOS states that countries can’t claim sovereignty over any land masses that are submerged at high tide, or that were previously submerged but have been raised above high tide level by construction; and

WHEREAS, Control of the South China Sea would allow China to dominate a major trade route through which most of its imported oil flows; and

WHEREAS, It would also allow China to disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, trade shipments to all countries in East and Southeast Asia as well as deny access to foreign military forces, particularly the United States; and

WHEREAS, The floor of the South China Sea may contain massive oil and natural gas reserves and sovereignty over the region could give China a level of energy security and independence far beyond what it currently possesses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urge Congress to use aircraft and naval vessels to assert freedom of navigation in the region, as demonstrated by the recent passage of the USS Fort Worth combat ship and the flight of the U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft, over the Chinese construction at Fiery Reef; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support strengthening regional allies through intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities, and provide them with updated military hardware to counter China’s technical advantages in both quantity and quality.

RESOLUTION NO.  108
SUBJECT: OPPOSE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL
Origin: National Security Committee

WHEREAS, The American Legion views nuclear weapons development and proliferation a critical threat to national security; and

WHEREAS, Allowing Iran to develop or acquire a nuclear weapon would destabilize the entire Middle East and pose an eminent threat to Israel; and

WHEREAS, The Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an non-binding executive agreement which was signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between Iran, and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, and Germany (also known as the P5+1) along with the European Union; and

WHEREAS, The JCPOA allows Iran to retain its nuclear infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, Under the JCPOA, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will have 24-hour access to Iran’s declared nuclear sites but will be faced with a stipulated 24-day notification and appeal period when requesting access to Iran’s military facilities or undeclared sites or suspected sites—thereby possibly allowing Iran to hide, remove or transport nuclear-weapon materials and operations in a clandestine manner; and

WHEREAS, Not all verification and monitoring mechanisms are defined in the JCPOA; and

WHEREAS, Important verification and monitoring mechanisms have been defined in agreements made solely between the IAEA and Iran separate and apart from the JCPOA
and these same verification and monitoring agreements remain undisclosed to Congress or
the Administration for review; and

WHEREAS, Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran were extinguished in
1980 and therefore U.S. citizens are prohibited from being a part of any IAEA inspection
team located in Iran; and

WHEREAS, The JCPOA removes a United Nations embargo prohibiting
conventional weapons exports to Iran in five years and ballistic missile technology in eight
years; and

WHEREAS, Ending the conventional-weapons embargo would permit Russia to sell
Iran ballistic missiles which have the capability to reach Israel and overseas targets; and

WHEREAS, By lifting U.S. and international sanctions in accordance with the
JCPOA, an estimated $100 billion dollars will be released to Iran which may be used to
fund terrorism against Americans, American interests and allies; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in
Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urges Congress
not to lift any sanctions in connection with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
(JCPOA) also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal until such agreement is amended by
including all verification and monitoring mechanisms as well as including a provision
stipulating unconditional access to every aspect of Iran’s nuclear program—whether
declared or undeclared—to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency
(IAEA) and that these amendments are ultimately agreed to in a timely manner by Iran and
the P5+1; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the United States of America be prepared to exercise all options
up to and including military action in the interest of preventing Iran from obtaining a
nuclear weapon.

APPROVED WITH AMENDMENTS

RESOLUTION NO. 37
SUBJECT: POW/MIA POLICIES
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, American service members and civilians remain missing in action or
otherwise unaccounted for from America’s past wars and conflicts, and reports indicate
that in former enemy areas where Americans could still be alive, information has been
deliberately and cruelly withheld; and

WHEREAS, The families of POW/MIA’s suffer untold uncertainty due to the lack of
an accurate accounting for their missing loved one, often in spite of heroic efforts by U.S.
specialists; and

WHEREAS, The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2010 called upon
the Secretary of Defense to provide funds, personnel, and resources as the Secretary
considers appropriate to significantly increase the capability and capacity of the
Department of Defense (DOD), the Armed Forces, and commanders of the combatant
commands to account for missing persons so that, beginning with fiscal year 2015, the
POW/MIA accounting community has sufficient resources to ensure that at least 200
missing persons are accounted for under the program annually; and

WHEREAS, Advancements in science, forensic technology and foreign government
cooperation have helped specific locations of alleged remains of US personnel to be
recently identified by the U.S. Government; and

WHEREAS, Promising identification techniques involving radiographic comparison
and facial superimposition have dramatically increased the U.S. Government’s ability to
identify remains of unaccounted for servicemen and civilians for whom DNA matching
was not an alternative; and
WHEREAS, Each member of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community plays a vital role in the mission to account for missing and unaccounted for U.S. servicemen and civilians from our nation’s past wars and conflicts; and

WHEREAS, The Secretary of Defense recently directed “complete reorganization” of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community, a consolidation encouraging to family members and veterans, though the end-result will require close scrutiny for viability; and

WHEREAS, The single agency that was formed as a result of the Defense Secretary’s directive for “complete reorganization” was titled the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and is the agency responsible for policy, administration and operational implementation to achieve the fullest possible accounting for missing U.S. personnel; and

WHEREAS, The POW/MIA accounting effort should not be considered complete until all reasonable actions have been taken to achieve the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. personnel; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion advocates for the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans, in every country, on every continent; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes U.S. Government POW/MIA operations, though currently still inadequate, are achieving substantial progress; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion remains steadfast in our commitment to the goal of achieving the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. military personnel and designated civilian personnel missing and unaccounted for from our nation’s wars and conflicts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the President and Congress to speak out on every occasion to expedite the return of U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for, regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the President and Congress to support legislation and policies that will use all reasonable resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American service members and designated civilians regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide full funding, personnel, and any other resources for all members of the Department of Defense (DOD) POW/MIA accounting community, and to ensure these funds not be redirected by the DOD for any other purpose; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to continue to declassify all POW/MIA information (except that revealing intelligence sources or methods) in a form readily available to the affected families and public review; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to establish a joint standing congressional committee on POW/MIA affairs to ensure continued priority action by the executive branch in addressing the POW/MIA issue; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to initiate or strengthen joint commissions with Russia, the People's Republic of China, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea to increase POW/MIA accounting and recovery efforts; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to take further favorable actions toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as Hanoi increases efforts to provide the fullest possible accounting for US personnel still missing in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia it controlled during the Vietnam War; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That "fullest possible accounting" is defined as turning over live prisoners, repatriating remains of those killed in action or who died in captivity, or providing convincing evidence when neither is possible.

RECEIVE AND RECORD
RESOLUTION NO. 4
SUBJECT: TAIWAN STRAITS DIALOGUE
Origin: Alaska

RESOLUTION NO. 39
SUBJECT: TAIWAN STRAITS DIALOGUE
Origin: Maryland

LAW AND ORDER & HOMELAND SECURITY
George Wehrli, Florida, Chairman
APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 48
SUBJECT: SECOND AMENDMENT
Origin: Washington
WHEREAS, All members of The American Legion are wartime Veterans who believe in the precepts of The Constitution of The United States; and
WHEREAS, At more than one time in the lives of these self-same Veterans, he/she has sworn to “…uphold and defend The Constitution of The United States…” and upon entering the Military include the phrase – “…against all enemies, both foreign and domestic; and
WHEREAS, In several states individual state laws have been created encroaching upon our “rights” under the Constitution; specifically, in abrogation of The Second Amendment; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is the largest Veterans’ Service Organization in the world, being an effective voice against tyranny; and
WHEREAS, For the sake of all who have served in the Military of The United States, and for the sake of our youth – the future of our country, The American Legion seeks to remind the elected Senators and Representatives of their obligation to listen to and vote in line with the wishes of their constituents; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, that The American Legion should enforce the will of the citizens of the United States; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That Those States, including the State of Washington, which have passed restrictive legislation, in deference to the Second Amendment, issue repeals at their earliest opportunity to reverse these unfair/unrepresented Firearm “regulations; which are in opposition to our rights under the Constitution.

MILITARY BENEFITS & QUALITY OF LIFE
Melvin Smullen, Maryland, Chairman
APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 23
SUBJECT: FAMILY SUBSISTENCE SUPPLEMENTAL ALLOWANCE
Origin: Pennsylvania
WHEREAS, One of the Four Pillars of The American Legion is National Security; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for our military and their families; and
WHEREAS, Part of the National Security is maintaining a strong military; and
WHEREAS, The morale of the military has a direct effect on strength of the military; and
WHEREAS, Some military families rely on food stamps and other programs to survive; and
WHEREAS, The majority of military families are not familiar with the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA Program); and
WHEREAS, Families must apply for these benefits and the DOD website dealing with FSSA had only 11,214 visitors which indicates not many families know of the program; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, urges Congress and the Department of Defense to support legislation to properly fund the quality of life features including the funding of the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance.

RESOLUTION NO. 27
SUBJECT: EXTENDED CARE HEALTH OPTION
Origin: Pennsylvania
WHEREAS, One of the Four Pillars of The American Legion is National Security; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for our military and their families; and
WHEREAS, Part of the National Security is maintaining a strong military; and
WHEREAS, The morale of the military has a direct effect on strength of the military; and
WHEREAS, Some military members have special health needs for their families such as autism, intellectual disability, serious physical disabilities and all extraordinary physical or psychological conditions; and
WHEREAS, Children may remain eligible for Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) benefits beyond the usual TRICARE eligibility age limit age 21 or age 23 provided the sponsor remains on active duty, the child is incapable of self-support, the sponsor is responsible for over 50 percent of the child’s financial support; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD) to support legislation to properly fund the quality of life features including the funding of the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) which provides supplemental service to active duty family members with qualifying mental or physical disabilities; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That the DOD inform active duty members of this benefit.

RESOLUTION NO. 33
SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE STANDARDS
Origin: Maryland
WHEREAS, The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for members of the Armed Forces, their dependents, military retirees, and survivors as people are the foundation of our Nation's fighting forces; and
WHEREAS, Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace; and
WHEREAS, Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether good service members and their families remain in military service: Other major factors include fair treatment, career stability, regular promotions, adequate quarters, adequate health care, commissaries, and day care facilities, all of which ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of service members; and
WHEREAS, Our military retirees and their dependents and survivors are deserving and rightfully entitled to adequate health care treatment, concurrent receipt, and regular cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to military retirement pay and survivor benefit plans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense to support and fund quality of life features including, but not limited to, the following: military pay comparability for the Armed Forces and regular increases in the Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH); renovation and construction of military quarters and increased funding for child day care centers and pay raises must be competitive with the private sector; adequate medical, mental, and dental health services; morale, welfare, and recreational facilities; non-privatized exchanges and commissary facilities, and the Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) and its functions should be retained and not relegated to the military services; preserving an attractive retirement system for the active and reserve components; oppose any changes to the military retirement system, whether prospective or retroactive, that would violate contracts made with military retirees and that would undermine morale and readiness; requiring the Services perform mandatory physical examinations, without waivers, for all separating and retiring servicemembers within 90 days of separation from service; full funding concurrent receipt of military retirement pay, and VA disability compensation as well as Special Compensation pays for disabled military retirees; that the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset be eliminated; TRICARE for Life and the TRICARE Senior Pharmacy program for Medicare-eligible military retirees, their dependents and military survivors, should be adequately funded; regular cost-of-living adjustments to military retirement and increased death gratuity payments; combat zone tax exclusions for service in South Korea; that Congress extend and improve additional quality of life benefits, allowances and privileges to the National Guard and Reserves involved in homeland security and other missions so as to more closely approximate those of the active force; military retirement pay and TRICARE health care for members of the Reserve Components should be authorized before age 60; tax credits to private businesses that pay the difference between military and civilian salaries to mobilized reserve component service members; restore travel exemptions for Reserve and Guard members for expenses associated with attending drills; military health care should also be provided to members of the Reserve Components and their dependents, who become injured while on active duty status regardless of the number of days served on active duty, to the same degree as active duty members under the same circumstances; and whenever a Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) is conducted, certain base facilities such as base medical facilities, commissaries, exchanges and other facilities be preserved for use by active duty, reserve forces personnel, military retired veterans and their families.

RESOLUTION NO. 34
SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEM
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace; and

WHEREAS, Preserving an attractive retirement system for the active and reserve components is critical to maintaining an effective all-volunteer force; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense has on several occasions conducted studies to change, modify, and update the military retirement system; and

WHEREAS, Recommendations from those studies have been repeatedly found to be unsatisfactory; and
WHEREAS, The July 2011 Defense Business Board study recommended significant changes in the current military retirement system; and
WHEREAS, Many of these same recommendations were made by the 1978 Presidential Commission on Military Compensation; and
WHEREAS, The 1978 report from the Congressional Budget Office addresses the significant risk to maintaining a viable volunteer force if dramatic changes to the current system are made; and
WHEREAS, In the attempt to slow the growth in military personnel costs, The Department of Defense 2013 Budget Request calls for the creation of an independent commission to study the military retirement system; and
WHEREAS, The Murray-Ryan Bill and the Bipartisan Budget Act 2013 were passed with the devastating cut to Military COLA included, though no input was received from the Department of Defense or the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC); and
WHEREAS, On February 12, 2014, under tremendous pressure from the military community, Congress overwhelmingly voted 95-3 to repeal the COLA cut for all military members who joined prior to January 1, 2014 and President Obama signed the repeal into law; and
WHEREAS, MCRMC released 15 recommendations to modernize the Uniformed Services’ compensation and benefit programs today, 29 January 2015; and
WHEREAS, On March 25, 2015, The American Legion gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives which states, “The American Legion does not support this (MCRMC’s Modifying the Military Retirement Plan) proposal; there are too many questions about the implementation and concerns about how service members would be affected; however given that approximately four out of five (81 percent) service members do not serve the full 20 years in the military, it is worth examining possible solutions and measures which could provide some retirement benefits to those service members who depart from military service before the “20 year cliff”; and
WHEREAS, Any changes to the existing military retirement system may violate contracts made with military retirees and currently serving military personnel, and would undermine morale and readiness; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion oppose any changes to the current military retirement system which reduces the incentive for enlistment or re-enlistment.

RESOLUTION NO. 49
SUBJECT: SPACE-A TRAVEL FOR UNEMPLOYED AND DISABLED VETERANS AND DEPENDENTS
Origin: Washington
WHEREAS, The United States Department of Defense (DoD) in DoD Regulation 4515.13-R has established a program of travel known as Space Available Travel to allow authorized passengers to occupy DoD aircraft seats that are surplus after all required passengers have been accommodated; and
WHEREAS, The purpose of this privilege was to provide uniformed service members with a respite from the rigors of military service, and to provide retired uniformed service members with recognition for a career of rigorous duty; and
WHEREAS, The privilege is also extended to other categories of passengers, to include dependents, in support of the mission of the Uniformed Service members; and
WHEREAS, DOD regulation 4515.13-R does not provide for 100% disabled veterans, or 100% Individually Unemployed (IU) veterans, or dependents of 100% disabled veterans, or dependents of 100% IU veterans, to be eligible for Space Available Travel; and
WHEREAS, 100% disabled veterans and 100% IU veterans may not have fulfilled the requirements for retirement, but have shown dedication to the DoD and a desire to retire by serving ten or more years of active duty service and separated due to their great sacrifice in the line of duty that resulted in a 100% disability rating or 100% IU; and

WHEREAS, Dependents of 100% disabled veterans and 100% IU veterans continue to faithfully support their disabled spouses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urges Congress to authorize the Department of Defense to offer space available worldwide travel on military aircraft to 100% disabled veterans and 100% IU veterans who served ten or more years on active duty, and their dependents be authorized to participate in Space Available Travel.

RESOLUTION NO. 60
SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR CONCURRENT RECEIPT OF MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY AND VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION
Origin: Minnesota

WHEREAS, We reaffirm our support of veterans who have served our country as career military men and women; and

WHEREAS, These retired veterans were injured or disabled as a result of their service; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees have devoted more than 20 years to defending our country and democracy; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees are the only federal retirees who pay out of their own pocket for their service connected disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, Military retirees with 50% or greater service connected disabilities are able to receive both military retired pay and VA disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, All other federal retirees receive both retirement pay and disability compensation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion strongly support ending the unfair policy of forcing many military longevity retirees to forfeit some of their retired pay in order to receive equal amounts of disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), for those retirees with less than 50% service connected disability.

RESOLUTION NO. 107
SUBJECT: MILITARY COMPENSATION AND RETIREMENT MODERNIZATION COMMISSION POSITIONS
Origin: National Security Committee

WHEREAS, The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) was established by the National Defense Authorization Act FY 2013 Pub. L. 112-239, 126 Stat. 1787 (2013) to conduct a review of military compensation and retirement systems and to make recommendations to modernize such systems in order to--

1. ensure the long-term viability of the All-Volunteer Force by sustaining the required human resources of that force during all levels of conflict and economic conditions;

2. enable the quality of life for members of the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services and their families in a manner that fosters successful recruitment, retention, and careers for members of the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services; and

3. modernize and achieve fiscal sustainability for the compensation and retirement systems for the Armed Forces and the other uniformed services for the 21st century; and

WHEREAS, MCRMC released 15 recommendations to modernize the Uniformed Services’ compensation and benefit programs today, 29 January 2015; and
WHEREAS, MCRMC’s 15 recommendations are as follows: **Recommendation 1**: Help more Service members save for retirement earlier in their careers, leverage the retention power of traditional Uniformed Services retirement, and give the Services greater flexibility to retain quality people in demanding career fields by implementing a modernized retirement system; **Recommendation 2**: Provide more options for Service members to protect their pay for their survivors by offering new Survivor Benefit Plan coverage without Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset; **Recommendation 3**: Promote Service members’ financial literacy by implementing a more robust financial and health benefit training program; **Recommendation 4**: Increase efficiency within the Reserve Component by consolidating 30 Reserve Component duty statuses into 6 broader statuses; **Recommendation 5**: Ensure Service members receive the best possible combat casualty care by creating a joint readiness command, new standards for essential medical capabilities, and innovative tools to attract readiness-related medical cases to military hospitals; **Recommendation 6**: Increase access, choice, and value of health care for active-duty family members, Reserve Component members, and retirees by allowing beneficiaries to choose from a selection of commercial insurance plans offered through a Department of Defense health benefit program; **Recommendation 7**: Improve support for Service members’ dependents with special needs by aligning services offered under the Extended Care Health Option to those of state Medicaid waiver programs; **Recommendation 8**: Improve collaboration between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs by enforcing coordination on electronic medical records, a uniform formulary for transitioning Service members, common services, and reimbursements; **Recommendation 9**: Protect both access to and savings at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges by consolidating these activities into a single defense resale organization; **Recommendation 10**: Improve access to child care on military installations by ensuring the Department of Defense has the information and budgeting tools to provide child care within 90 days of need; **Recommendation 11**: Safeguard education benefits for Service members by reducing redundancy and ensuring the fiscal sustainability of education programs; **Recommendation 12**: Better prepare Service members for transition to civilian life by expanding education and granting states more flexibility to administer the Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program; **Recommendation 13**: Ensure Service members receive financial assistance to cover nutritional needs by providing them cost-effective supplemental benefits; **Recommendation 14**: Expand Space-Available travel to more dependents of Service members by allowing travel by dependents of Service members deployed for 30 days or more; and **Recommendation 15**: Measure how the challenges of military life affect children’s school work by implementing a national military dependent student identifier.

WHEREAS, On March 25, 2015, The American Legion gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives and stated that The American Legion supports recommendations nos. 3, 8, 12, 14 and 15; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion testimony stated as well, that it does not support recommendations nos. 1, 2, 6, and 11; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion testimony also stated that it maintains no position in connection to recommendations nos. 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 13; and

WHEREAS, the American Legion National Security Commission has deliberated the merits of either supporting or not supporting each of the recommendations in which The American Legion previously maintained no position, i.e. recommendations 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 13; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 4, current Title 10 Reserve Component (RC) statutory authorities and duty statuses are as follows: full mobilization, partial mobilization, Presidential reserve call-up, Major disaster/emergency response, preplanned combatant command, captive status, unsatisfactory participation (45 days), unsatisfactory participation (24 months), disciplinary action, annual active duty (up to 30 days), additional
training and operational support, medical evaluation and treatment, medical care (duty < 30 days), retiree recall, muster duty, duty at the national guard bureau, aid for state governments, enforce federal authority, National Guard called to federal service, additional training periods, additional flight training periods, readiness management periods, funeral honors duty; Title 32 – National Guard required training and other duty, additional training and other duty, additional training periods, additional flight training periods, readiness management periods and funeral honors duty; Title 14 – U.S. Coast Guard emergency augmentation; and

WHEREAS, According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, the numerous criteria for determining Reserve Component statuses can make it difficult for military commanders to call RC members to duty because the current system is complex, aligns poorly to current training and complicates rather than supports effective budgeting; and

WHEREAS, the MCRMC recommends streamlining RC duty status to the following six categories: Title 10 Active Duty, Inactive Reserve Service, Federal Service (Presidential Call-Up), Title 32 Full-Time National Guard, Inactive National Guard, Title 14 Active Duty for emergency augmentation; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 5, the MCRMC is calling for the creation of a four-star Joint Readiness Command to manage the readiness, as well as the interoperability, efficiency, and “jointness” of the entire military force, including medical readiness; and

WHEREAS, According to the MCRMC, this recommendation is made for fear of losing the life-saving capabilities developed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom by joint-military medical personnel; and

WHEREAS, the ingenuity, adroitness and first-hand experience of U.S. medical personnel are the reasons for the development of these effective capabilities; and

WHEREAS, Each branch of the military can benefit from experience-based training and not necessarily by the creation of redundant bureaucracy or added layer to the Military Health System’s command structure or the Defense Health Agency (DHA); and

WHEREAS, The Military Health System (MHS) is a global, comprehensive, integrated system that includes combat medical services, health readiness futures, a health care delivery system, public health activities, medical education and training, and medical research and development. The fundamental mission of the MHS, providing medical support to military operations

WHEREAS, According to the Department of Defense, DHA is a joint, integrated Combat Support Agency that enables the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services to provide a medically ready force and ready medical force to Combatant Commands in both peacetime and wartime; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 7, Exceptional Family Members (EMF) are service members who have family members with special medical or educational needs and EMFs can register for TRICARE Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) program; and

WHEREAS, Children may remain eligible for ECHO benefits beyond the usual TRICARE eligibility age limit (age 21 or age 23 if enrolled in a full-time course of study at an approved institution of higher learning and if the sponsor provides over 50 percent of the financial support) provided all of the following are true: the sponsor remains on active duty; the child is incapable of self-support because of a mental or physical incapacity that occurs prior to the loss of eligibility; and the sponsor is responsible for over 50 percent of the child’s financial support; and

WHEREAS, Lack of proper funding for maintaining DoD quality of life programs including ECHO, risks a deteriorating effect on military healthcare options specifically established to provide supplemental service and benefits to active duty family members with qualifying mental or physical disabilities; and
WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendations 9, any effort to reduce or dismantle the integrity of the military commissary system would be seen as a serious breach of faith with a benefit system that currently serves as a mainstay for the active and reserve components, military retirees and military survivors, and 100 percent service-connected disabled veterans, among other qualifying personnel; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 10, Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether a good service member and their families remain in military service and adequate access to child care is crucial to supporting valuable assistance that can ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, In reference to Recommendation 13, MCRMC recognizes that some service members will continue to need financial help to purchase food for their families and the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (SNAP), better known as food stamps, is available to service members in the United States, however, the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA), the military’s alternative to SNAP, is currently a second option, but only serves approximately 300 service members a year; and

WHEREAS, Considering the low number of participants, it appears that the majority of military families in-need are not familiar with FSSA due to the lack of promotion of the FSSA website by Department of Defense; and

WHEREAS, MCRMC recommends that FSSA should be retained for service members in overseas locations where SNAP is unavailable, but should be sunset over a two-year period in the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, Military families in-need should be allowed more than one option when applying for assistance; and

WHEREAS, Lack of proper funding for maintaining DoD quality of life programs including FSSA, risks a deteriorating effect on overall morale; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion supports the following MCRMC recommendations: Recommendation 3: Promote Service members’ financial literacy by implementing a more robust financial and health benefit training program; Recommendation 4: Increase efficiency within the Reserve Component by consolidating 30 Reserve Component duty statuses into 6 broader statuses; Recommendation 8: Improve collaboration between the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs by enforcing coordination on electronic medical records, a uniform formulary for transitioning Service members, common services, and reimbursements; Recommendation 10: Improve access to child care on military installations by ensuring the Department of Defense has the information and budgeting tools to provide child care within 90 days of need; Recommendation 12: Better prepare Service members for transition to civilian life by expanding education and granting states more flexibility to administer the Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program; Recommendation 14: Expand Space-Available travel to more dependents of Service members by allowing travel by dependents of Service members deployed for 30 days or more; and Recommendation 15: Measure how the challenges of military life affect children’s school work by implementing a national military dependent student identifier; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion does not support MCRMC Recommendation 1: Help more Service members save for retirement earlier in their careers, leverage the retention power of traditional Uniformed Services retirement, and give the Services greater flexibility to retain quality people in demanding career fields by implementing a modernized retirement system; Recommendation 2: Provide more options for Service members to protect their pay for their survivors by offering new Survivor Benefit Plan coverage without Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset; Recommendation 5: Ensure Service members receive the best possible combat casualty care by creating a joint readiness command, new standards for essential medical capabilities, and innovative tools to attract readiness-related medical cases to military
hospitals; Recommendation 6: Increase access, choice, and value of health care for active-duty family members, Reserve Component members, and retirees by allowing beneficiaries to choose from a selection of commercial insurance plans offered through a Department of Defense health benefit program; Recommendation 7: Improve support for Service members’ dependents with special needs by aligning services offered under the Extended Care Health Option to those of state Medicaid waiver programs; Recommendation 9: Protect both access to and savings at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges by consolidating these activities into a single defense resale organization; Recommendation 11: Safeguard education benefits for Service members by reducing redundancy and ensuring the fiscal sustainability of education programs; and Recommendation 13: Ensure Service members receive financial assistance to cover nutritional needs by providing them cost-effective supplemental benefits.

CONSOLIDATED

RESOLUTION NO. 51 with Resolution No. 60 (Minnesota)
SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR CONCURRENT RECEIPT OF MILITARY RETIREMENT AND VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION
Origin: New York

REFER TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION NO. 25
SUBJECT: MERGE PX/BX COMMISSARIES
Origin: Pennsylvania

RESOLUTION NO. 92
SUBJECT: RETIREMENT BENEFITS AND SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP) GAP
Origin: North Carolina

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE FORCES
William Goede, Minnesota, Chairman

APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 36
SUBJECT: SUPPORT VETERAN STATUS FOR NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE SERVICE MEMBERS
Origin: Maryland

WHEREAS, For the purposes of this resolution, the term Reserve Component represents the National Guard, Air National Guard, and the Reserves of all U.S. Military and Naval Branches; and

WHEREAS, Any provision within the United States Code pertaining to both the Active and Reserve Components should also be true for the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve in terms of receiving legal and technical veterans’ status; and

WHEREAS, According to United State Code (USC) Title 38 - Veterans’ Benefits, the term “veteran” is defined as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable;” and

WHEREAS, Also according to USC Title 38, “drills” and “active duty for training” do not qualify as “active duty” thereby excluding approximately 280,000 former Reserve Component retirees among other service members who have served in the Reserve Component from the honor of having the technical and legal status of the title: Veteran; and
WHEREAS, As USC Title 38 currently stands, any Reserve-Component service member who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable but never called to federal duty for other than drills or active duty for training is indeed entitled to benefits such as retirement pay, TRICARE, VA service-connection eligibility among other benefits but is still not however legally or technically considered a Veteran according to the letter of the law; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion recognizes the military service of all those who serve in the Guard and Reserve who have supported and continue to support the deployments of the active duty component ensuring active units are fully prepared at all times; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion states that anyone who has in good faith taken the United States Armed Forces Oath of Enlistment or United States Uniformed Services Oath of Office for either full-time active military or naval duty, or for the National Guard, Air National Guard, Reserve Component, Coast Guard or Coast Guard Reserve and has honorably carried out the military obligations set forth within these oaths should be entitled to receiving the practical, technical and legal status of the title: Veteran; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that amends any provision in the United States Code that excludes drills or active-duty-for-training from the legal definition of active duty to a provision that includes drills or active-duty-for-training in the definition of active duty under the law.

UNCONVENTIONAL FORCES AND INTELLIGENCE
Chuck Roessler, Wisconsin, Chairman

APPROVED

RESOLUTION NO. 106
SUBJECT: CYBERSECURITY AND IDENTITY THEFT
Origin: National Security Committee

WHEREAS, The security of the United States is being increasingly challenged by non-traditional threats which may extend the fields of battle and terrorism to cyberspace warfare; and

WHEREAS, The United States government maintains a comprehensive and integrated system of federal agencies, including the Armed Forces, law enforcement, intelligence, and public health, to detect, deter and defend against cyberspace warfare threats to critical government and private infrastructures; and

WHEREAS, Presidential Decision Directive 62 (PDD-62), titled Combating Terrorism established the National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently discovered two separate but related cybersecurity incidents that have impacted the data of Federal government employees, contractors, members of the armed forces including veterans:

In April 2015, OPM discovered that the personnel data of 4.2 million current and former Federal government employees including members of the military and veterans had been stolen; this means information such as full name, birth date, home address and Social Security Numbers were affected; and

While investigating this incident, in early June 2015, OPM discovered that additional information had been compromised: including background investigation records of current, former, and prospective Federal employees and contractors; and

WHEREAS, OPM has concluded with high confidence that sensitive information—including the Social Security Numbers (SSNs) of 21.5 million individuals—was stolen from the background investigation databases; and
WHEREAS, This includes 19.7 million individuals that applied for a background investigation, and 1.8 million non-applicants, primarily spouses or co-habitants of applicants and some records also include findings from interviews conducted by background investigators and approximately 1.1 million include fingerprints; and
WHEREAS, Usernames and passwords that background investigation applicants used to fill out their background investigation forms were also stolen; and
WHEREAS, The Government Printing Office (GPO) has published registers of Commissioned Navy, Air Force, USMC and Army Officers on an unrestricted basis during the Vietnam Era; and
WHEREAS, these registers were published with Social Security Numbers (SSN) instead of Service Numbers; and
WHEREAS, Sometime later, one or more web-based business organizations digitized these unrestricted registers and subsequently posted the unrestricted registers on the Internet making them publicly available; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Baltimore, Maryland, September 1, 2, 3, 2015, That The American Legion urge Congress to appropriate the necessary funding to combat both international and domestic cybersecurity threats to the United States in the 21st century; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to appropriate the necessary funding to any federal law enforcement agencies for the purpose of searching and removing Vietnam veterans’ Social Security numbers from publicly available websites found on the Internet; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Federal investigators to request powers from the appropriate court to subpoena specific registers of enlisted personnel and Commissioned Navy, Air Force, USMC and Army Officers which include Social Security numbers belonging to any public library—which are vulnerable to computer scanning and Internet posting—for the purpose of classifying such registers as “restricted” or “restricted access” as defined by the USA Freedom Act; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion also urge the American public to be vigilant of cyberspace attacks, and that all efforts be made to detect, deter, and defend against the threats of cyberspace warfare, and to prosecute violators to the fullest extent of the law.

Mr. Commander, National Officers, and Fellow Delegates. I am particularly pleased to announce the winners of the National Blood Donor Awards for this past year.
Category I - Departments with 100,000 or more members
   Post & Individual Participation: Department of Minnesota

Category II - 70,000 to 99,999 members
   Post & Individual Participation: Department of Maryland

Category III - 40,000 to 69,999 members
   Post & Individual Participation: Department of Georgia

Category IV - 25,000 to 39,999 members
   Post & Individual Participation: Department of Tennessee

Category V - 10,000 to 24,999 members
   Post & Individual Participation: Department of Montana

Category VI - less than 10,000 members
   Post & Individual Participation: No Submission

Many of our Departments participated in the ROTC Awards Program this year. A total of almost 4,500 medals were awarded to deserving cadets in Senior ROTC and Junior ROTC Units. The winning Departments for 2014-2015 are the Departments of Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and Tennessee. This speaks well for these Departments and The American Legion in their recognition of the youth of America enrolled in ROTC programs.
Mr. Commander, as a Delegate to this Convention from the Department of Maryland, I move the adoption of this report.

National Executive Committee Meetings, Fall 2015

The National Security Commission and its seven committees along with the council continue to review developments in the national security and foreign relations arenas. Several referred resolutions are currently under review by the commission and we continue to assess our nation’s defense posture for possible proposed resolutions. There are more than 80 active national security resolutions with legislative intent. The following are updates on several critical areas for your review:

Defense Resourcing

Shortly before retiring this summer, both former Army Secretary John McHugh and former Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno urged Congress to prevent the return of funding caps imposed by the Budget Control Act, also known as sequestration. Secretary McHugh stated, “As we face extreme instability around the world, we must have certainty here at home. Your soldiers deserve no less. We must have an end to sequestration this year.”

Gen. Odierno stated, “If these caps remain, we can no longer execute the defense strategic guidance. The decisions we make today and over the next several months will impact our nation for the next 10 years.”

Not only do the spending cuts downsize the force structure, but also reduce service members pay and benefits, which could lead to the loss of highly trained and experienced men and women who are serving in uniform to the private sector.

While our military is shrinking in size and scope, our major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rouge nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities.

Military Retirement System

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2016 includes the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission’s (MCRMC) recommendation to change the existing military retirement system to a blended system; where 20% of the benefit would depend on a retiree’s own investments over the course of their military career.

The American Legion does not support this change to the military retirement system; there are too many questions about the implementation and concerns about how service members would be affected.

Decline in Forces

The gap between the demands on our military and resources continues to get larger. Since 2012, the Army has cut its war-time force from 570,000 to 490,000; accompanying a reduction of 13 of the Army's 45 brigade combat teams. If the automatic budget cuts known as sequestration, continue in this fiscal year, the Army would have to slash another 40,000 soldiers. Defense officials have said that the Army would not be able to respond to demands for troops in other regions of the world while maintaining our current deployment obligations.

The Army maintains that dipping below 450,000 soldiers could prevent it from prevailing in a war. Twenty-five years ago, the U.S. maintained over 1669 overseas bases and there are just 587 today. Less forward presence means a reduction in deterrents and the bolstering tactical advantages of Russia, China and Iran. Repair and modernization efforts in connection with major big-ticket items such as ships and aircraft are being negatively impacted by these arbitrary budget policies. The training regimen for our troops is now slower and less frequent due to budget cutbacks. Our military leaders have repeated: predictable funding is vital and using funds from the overseas contingency operations ledger is not a long-term solution.
Defense leaders are asking themselves the question: can we overcome continuous challenges to U.S. security when sequestration restricts us from conducting near-term and long-term planning at the same time? Continuing to operate this way increases the risk of security failure.

**ISIS Conflict**

FBI Director James Comey has said that the threat of ISIS on U.S. soil keeps him up at night, and it's a threat that is bigger than al Qaeda. Now that Russia is bombing both ISIS and Non-ISIS fighters in Syria who are opposing the al-Assad regime, the U.S. military and foreign policy challenges are heightened even further.

In terms of the domestic threat, consider last month’s report on combating terrorist travel published by the House Committee on Homeland Security. We are now witnessing the largest global convergence of jihadists in history. Islamic extremists from more than 100 countries have migrated to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq since 2011. Some flew to the region to oust Syrian dictator Assad.

However, the committee’s assessment also states that these extremists are now joining the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to become a part of the group’s “caliphate” and to expand its violence and oppression. More than 250 individuals from the United States have also joined or attempted to fight with extremists in the conflict zone, according to the report.

As previously stated, these extremists pose a serious threat to the United States and its allies. This enemy has combat experience and connections to international sympathizers. Many of them are only a plane-flight away from our shores. Currently extremists are busy recruiting a new generation of terrorists by radicalizing Americans and Europeans through the worldwide web to spread terrorism.

**POW/MIA Update**

As we advised this body at the 97th National Convention, the Defense Pow/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) and the Joint Pow/Mia Accounting Command (JPAC) officially merged this last year into the newly established Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA).

This is the culmination of former Secretary of Defense Hagel’s directions to reorganize a number of federal POW/MIA accountability agencies into a single, accountable organization with comprehensive oversight of the past conflict personnel accounting resources, research, and operations. The National League of POW/MIA Families and The American Legion are largely encouraged by this move. The DPAA Director Mike Linnington addressed the commission in Baltimore.

**Women in Combat Roles**

Recently the headlines have included the first two women to graduate from the U.S. Army Ranger School and Navy Secretary Ray Mabus’s plans to open all jobs in the sea services to female troops — including those in the Marine Corps infantry and Navy SEALs.

The American Legion’s position states that the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position specific standard depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.

Without Congressional hearings and oversight on this issue there exists the distinct possibility that changes will be made which lessen the current standards or set a double standard, one for men and one for women, for the sake of social experiments thereby reducing our nation’s military effectiveness.

The National Security Commission thanks National Commander Dale Barnett, our NEC Liaison and the distinguished members of the National Executive Committee for their continuing support.
The National Security Commission convened on February 22nd during the 56th Annual Washington Conference at the Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C. The following report is a summary of this session:

The commission was honored to welcome National Commander Dale Barnett and Past National Commanders (PNCs) Clarence M. Bacon and Clarence Hill. The National Security Commission was honored by their attendance and very appreciative of their participation.

National Commander Barnett began the session by giving an in-depth discussion on the importance of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), established January 15, 015. DPAA integrates the former offices of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), and Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL). National Commander Barnett described his personal experiences of being part of a planning mission while in South Korea. He also described a South Korean own forensics lab he visited that was assisting DPAA with identifications of remains. Commander Barnett concluded by recognizing the Director of DPAA, Michael Linnington, who was in attendance as an invited speaker.


1. Department of Defense - Force Strength Update

Mr. Christopher Skaluba, Principal Director for Strategy and Force Development in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy was our first guest speaker. Previously, Mr. Skaluba was Principal Director for European and NATO Policy where he acted for and collaborated with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Europe & NATO) on all matters falling within the broad spectrum of European and NATO policy. Mr. Skaluba was also OSD's Director for European Policy, where he was responsible for formulating, coordinating, and implementing U.S. defense policy for Europe. Mr. Skaluba began his presentation with a brief history and outline of DoD’s roles post World War II which lead to the establishment of his office, which has three primary roles. The first is developing and using advanced computer simulations to predict the future needs of DoD versus each opponent worldwide. The second role is assisting each individual military branch to development their future budget predictions. His final role is assisting the SECDEF with the allocation of the current budget in relation to future predictions. He provided the Commission with an overview of the President’s recently released $600 billion defense budget request for fiscal year 2017. When the budget is developed, his office focuses on three areas: 1. Modernization; 2. Force Stability; and 3. Readiness Capabilities. The current challenges faced are due primarily to the budget remaining the same while personnel costs continue to increase. The most noticeable impact to his office has been the decline in our ability to establish air superiority against China and Russia. Mr. Skaluba concluded by addressing the threats of unconventional warfare in the 21st century which continue to grow as our enemies develop more offensive capabilities while we fall further behind.

2. Marine Corps Recruiting

Guest speaker Lieutenant General Mark Andrew Brilakis, Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, United States Marine Corps provided the Commission with an update on recruiting and retention within the Marine Corps. LTG Brilakis has served as the Battery Officer, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines; Battery Commander, Battalion FDO, and S-3, 5th Battalion, 10th Marines; Naval Gunfire Control Officer and Assistant Supporting Arms Coordinator, Amphibious Group Two; Future Operations and MAGTF Planner, G-3, II MEF; Executive Officer, 10th Marine Regiment; Commanding Officer 1st
LTG Brilakis began by reporting that the three barriers to enlistment are mental, physical, and moral. Only approximately twenty five percent of 18 – 24 year olds are eligible for enlistment and these are the same best and brightest that the military is competing for against top colleges. He explained that the military finds millennials as just a different part of America. While they are different, they are just as dedicated to service as other generations. LTG Brilakis discussed the Marine Corp’s 20 year plan to reach out into more communities to find a broader variety of Marines. They would like to see at least four out of every 10 officers to be female and/or diverse. The Marines are required to do more with less as force reductions continue. In response the Marines are providing more resources through modernization of equipment, family support programs, and behavioral health programs.

3. Cybersecurity

Mr. Gregory J. Touhill, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cybersecurity and Communications within the National Protections and Programs Directorate (NPPD) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provided the cybersecurity presentation. His office he focuses on the development and implementation of operational programs designed to protect our government networks and critical infrastructure systems. His team’s mission has three folds with the first being managing risks for government departments. The second is managing private sector risks. The final being communicating the cyber eco system throughout the private sector to act as an overwatch against threats. Mr. Touhill emphasized that best practices would reduce approximately 80% of all risks. Our enemies are constantly scanning our defenses for vulnerabilities. He sees our greatest vulnerabilities being a poorly trained and task saturated workforce. He informed the Commission that financially motived criminals are expanding from bank account and credit card theft to selling medical records. Financial hacks are usually cut off quickly as people keep a close eye on their finances through activity alerts, whereas theft of medical information is often never noticed and has an emerging market. Mr. Touhill concluded by informing the Commission of his office’s stop.think.connect program that can be accessed at their website and provides many tools to assist with cybersecurity at the user level.

4. POW/MIA Update

The National Security Commission welcomed Mr. Michael S. Linnington, Director of the of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency; and Ann Mills-Griffiths, Chairman of the Board, National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, who briefed the commission on the progress of the DPAA and noted the challenges that lay ahead for the agency charged with the accounting and recovery of missing DoD personnel.

The speakers provided membership with very informative updates regarding overcoming successive budget crises, the remaining obstacle to increasing the pace and scope of accounting efforts while ensuring the safety of field recovery teams. Mr. Linnington provided his personal experience regarding the establishment of the U.S. – Russian Joint Commission following his recent 10 day trip to Moscow. The Russian government is developing an archive of records that DPAA will be allowed access to which will greatly increase records retrieval and updating.

Mr. Linnington updated the commission on DPAA staff relocations domestically and worldwide. He also provided and updated list MIAs by each war: WWII: 73182; Cold War: 126; Korea: 7824; Vietnam: 1623; and Current Conflicts: 6. He also announces that the new 130,000 square foot headquarters building located at Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam was up and running with 50,000 square feet of laboratory space.
Ann Mills-Griffiths highlighted challenges the accounting faces due to political insecurities. The unsettling conditions created by China island building in the South China Sea have created more military to military interaction which has helped with recovery efforts in neighboring countries. She also express strong support for Director Linnington and applauded the inclusion of The American Legion at DPAA family updates.

5. Business Session

The business session commenced by Chairman Schlee leading the Commission in reviewing two resolutions that were referred by the 2015 National Security Convention Committee, Resolution 25: Merge PX/BX Commissaries and Resolution 92: Retirement Benefits and Survivor Benefit (SBP) Gap. After a discussion the Commission voted to reject Resolution 25. After further discussion, the Commission decided that the intent of Resolution 92 could be resolved by communicating its message to DFAS by staff and it was therefore voted that the resolution be disposed of administratively.

The business session continued with remarks from Mr. Larry Romo, Director of the Selective Service System. Mr. Romo brought to the attention of the Commission two House Bills recently introduced with language to repeal the selective service system. These bills were introduced following implementation of the DoD policy allowing females to service in combat arms professions. He explained that the system not only ensure manpower when needed but acts as a show of strength to our enemies at a cost of only $23 million. Changes have been made to improve the system such as college students would have to serve once they finish their current semester if selected. The system is now implemented as a lottery and is tested monthly. The need for the system was emphasized with by addressing growing threats in China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorism.

Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee Chairman George Wehrli and members of the Committee reviewed 26 Law Officer of the Year packages and 20 Firefighter of the Year packages. Once the 10 regional winners were selected they selected the National Law Enforcement Officer and National Firefighter of the Year winners. The 2016 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year winner is from the Department of Illinois and the National Firefighter of the Year winner is from the Department of Florida.

Chairman Schlee provided the Commission members with a summary of the National Security Commission Outline of Authorizations. He reviewed assigned responsibilities covered in the summary as they are divided by the Commission, Committees, and Council. Chairman Schlee also addressed the workload associated with the renewal year for resolutions. In preparation, the Commission and Committee chairmen will be performing a review of all positions prior to National Convention.

To round out the meeting Commission Chairman Mike Schlee provided the Commission with a quick overview of the upcoming plans for this year’s National Security Commission Pre-Convention Trip. Deputy Director Freddy Gessner indicated a visit to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base will be the likely destination for the commission’s tour just prior the 2016 National Convention which will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Thank you very much, commander, and good morning ladies and gentlemen. Having been a staffer for 40 years, I always still feel a little uncomfortable being up in front of this august body. But it's a pleasure to be with you. You have received a copy of our advanced report from the meeting at the Washington conference wherein we discussed a variety of issues, had a good session.

In addition, two resolutions were considered during the business session in the afternoon, and they will be attached to our addendum to our report from today. Additionally, in the intervening period, all the resolutions are of legislative intent. A portfolio of nearly 80 plus resolutions have been sent to all the committee chairmen for
review, consideration, possible submission through the department conventions for consideration at the 98th National Convention.

We prepared a new report for you today where we discuss a variety of issues which we think are of concern. But I'd like to do just simple bullet points on three primary issues today.

The first is the health of the force. Most of us in this room are Vietnam veterans, and I'm still absolutely stunned when I see the amount of three, four, and five combat deployments. I know during my experience, some career soldiers in Vietnam maybe spent two, three, in some cases, four tours, but three, four, and five tours is just absolutely amazing. This is not limited to the active forces. This includes the reserve and guard. Obviously, this level of deployment burns out the force. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs says we will not reset the force until about 2020.

There are some other stressors going on out there which affect both the readiness and the psychological readiness of the force. As you know, last year there were changes in the military retirement system. There's a proposal kicking around now to reduce the commissary subsidy by a quarter of a billion dollars. Additionally, there are proposals kicking around out there in legislation to increase the TRICARE costs. There's a decision made to do the full integration of women into the combat arms. While we're not going to debate the merit of that issue today, that is, in fact, an additional stressor on the troops. So what I'm saying today, these troops are burned out, they're over-deployed, and it's an area of serious and continuing concern to this commission and to me personally.

Second area I want to touch on with a few bullet points, is providing for the common defense. We've escaped sequestration for just a little while, it's on temporary hold. The effects from three years of sequestration are still being felt, and there's going to be a continuing problem.

I will say that I've had the good judgment not to have watched too many hours of the political debate thus far in that silly season, but I will say, in my review of those things, I've seen no serious discussion of either strategy of where we need to go, nor for defense resourcing by any of the candidates. I think we have to demand, before this election is over, that both the strategy of the United States and the resourcing for our defense become key issues in the 2016 presidential election.

The National Defense Authorization Act, which was approved last week, outlined five threats which we all know about. I'll touch on them briefly, though. Obviously, North Korea, and they're planning some intermediate missile stuff right now. Iran, that's a continuing problem. A third area was China, and they're continuing naval exploits in the Pacific area. Russia, obviously they buzzed a couple of our war ships in the Baltic Sea. The fifth area was radical Islam. I'd like to spend a minute or two on radical Islam.

As you know, last week, I think, was the fifth anniversary of the killing of Osama bin Laden. However, al Qaida is not dead, they're making some inroads in Afghanistan. My understanding is they continue to make inroads in Africa, and they're not going away. Additionally, as we're all aware, the third U.S. SEAL was killed by ISIL in combat in Northern Iraq earlier this week. I guess Chief Petty Officer Keating, who is actually, I think, Charlie Keating's grandson, Keating, back in the '70s or '80s.

This is an ongoing problem, it won't go away. I think we should have had wake up calls by what happened in Paris and Brussels. I know that the FBI Director Comey said that currently they are tracking 1,200 potential terrorists in the United States. So in my view, we have internally been awfully lucky so far. Unfortunately, that luck may not continue.

General David Petraeus wrote a piece in the Washington Post that appeared two weeks ago. In it, he discussed what he called "the long war." The continuing war, which won't be years but decades, against radical Islam. I commend it to your attention, and we gave a pretty good excerpt in the report that's before you today. These are basically three areas I just wanted to share your commission's concern about and reflect with you.
I want to take a privilege of the chair for a second. This is actually something I enjoy doing. After a three month search, we finally do have a new staff director. I certainly want to introduce to you Rhonda Powell. (Applause)

Rhonda, it's great to have you aboard. Rhonda took over two weeks ago, and she is still serving, after a distinguished career as a major in the U.S. Army Reserve. It's great to have you with us. (Applause)

Additionally, in the first three months of this year, we were without a director through the Washington Conference. I want to introduce Freddie Gessner, the deputy. Freddie kept the ship afloat for those three months. I will be forever grateful to him, a true professional. Freddie, too, continues to serve as an E7 in the Air Guard. So thanks a lot, Freddie. (Applause)

In closing, I want to thank you, national commander, and I particularly like your Job One part of your speech on Monday. I didn't write that, but I would have. (Laughter)

I want to particularly thank our NEC liaison. Our thoughts, our prayers are with Merv like they are, like the rest of you. Additionally, I want to thank the entire body of the NEC for your continuing support of this commission, in our efforts to take care of the troops and to provide for the common defense. Thanks. (Applause)

Advance Report: National Security Commission
February 22, 2016
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman

The National Security Commission convened on February 22nd during the 56th Annual Washington Conference at the Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C. The following report is a summary of this session:

The commission was honored to welcome National Commander Dale Barnett and Past National Commanders (PNCs) Clarence M. Bacon and Clarence Hill. The National Security Commission was honored by their attendance and very appreciative of their participation.

National Commander Barnett began the session by giving an in-depth discussion on the importance of the National Commander Barnett described his personal experiences of being part of a planning mission while in South Korea. He also described a South Korean own forensics lab he visited that was assisting DPAA with identifications of remains. Commander Barnett concluded by recognizing the Director of DPAA, Michael Linnington, who was in attendance as an invited speaker.


1. Department of Defense - Force Strength Update

Mr. Christopher Skaluba, Principal Director for Strategy and Force Development in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy was our first guest speaker. Previously, Mr. Skaluba was Principal Director for European and NATO Policy where he acted for and collaborated with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Europe & NATO) on all matters falling within the broad spectrum of European and NATO policy. Mr. Skaluba was also OSD's Director for European Policy, where he was responsible for formulating, coordinating, and implementing U.S. defense policy for Europe. Mr. Skaluba began his presentation with a brief history and outline of DoD’s roles post-World War II which lead to the establishment of his office, which has three primary roles. The first is developing and using advanced computer simulations to predict the future needs of DoD versus each opponent worldwide. The second role is assisting each individual military branch to development their future budget predictions. His final role is assisting the SECDEF with the allocation of the current budget in relation to future predictions. He provided the Commission with an overview of the President’s recently released $600
billion defense budget request for fiscal year 2017. When the budget is developed, his office focuses on three areas: 1. Modernization; 2. Force Stability; and 3. Readiness Capabilities. The current challenges faced are due primarily to the budget remaining the same while personnel costs continue to increase. The most noticeable impact to his office has been the decline in our ability to establish air superiority against China and Russia. Mr. Skaluba concluded by addressing the threats of unconventional warfare in the 21st century which continue to grow as our enemies develop more offensive capabilities while we fall further behind.

2. Marine Corps Recruiting
Guest speaker Lieutenant General Mark Andrew Brilakis, Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, United States Marine Corps provided the Commission with an update on recruiting and retention within the Marine Corps. LTG Brilakis has served as the Battery Officer, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines; Battery Commander, Battalion FDO, and S-3, 5th Battalion, 10th Marines; Naval Gunfire Control Officer and Assistant Supporting Arms Coordinator, Amphibious Group Two; Future Operations and MAGTF Planner, G-3, II MEF; Executive Officer, 10th Marine Regiment; Commanding Officer 1st Battalion, 10th Marines; Commanding General, 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Deputy Commanding General, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and Commanding General, 3d Marine Division.

LTG Brilakis began by reporting that the three barriers to enlistment are mental, physical, and moral. Only approximately twenty five percent of 18 – 24 year olds are eligible for enlistment and these are the same best and brightest that the military is competing for against top colleges. He explained that the military finds millennials as just a different part of America. While they are different, they are just as dedicated to service as other generations. LTG Brilakis discussed the Marine Corp’s 20 year plan to reach out into more communities to find a broader variety of Marines. They would like to see at least four out of every 10 officers to be female and/or diverse. The Marines are required to do more with less as force reductions continue. In response the Marines are providing more resources through modernization of equipment, family support programs, and behavioral health programs.

3. Cybersecurity
Mr. Gregory J. Touhill, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cybersecurity and Communications within the National Protections and Programs Directorate (NPPD) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provided the cybersecurity presentation. His office he focuses on the development and implementation of operational programs designed to protect our government networks and critical infrastructure systems. His team’s mission has three folds with the first being managing risks for government departments. The second is managing private sector risks. The final being communicating the cyber eco system throughout the private sector to act as an overwatch against threats. Mr. Touhill emphasized that best practices would reduce approximately 80% of all risks. Our enemies are constantly scanning our defenses for vulnerabilities. He sees our greatest vulnerabilities being a poorly trained and task saturated workforce. He informed the Commission that financially motivated criminals are expanding from bank account and credit card theft to selling medical records. Financial hacks are usually cut off quickly as people keep a close eye on their finances through activity alerts, whereas theft of medical information is often never noticed and has an emerging market. Mr. Touhill concluded by informing the Commission of his office’s Stop.Think.Connect program that can be accessed at their website and provides many tools to assist with cybersecurity at the user level.
4. POW/MIA Update

The National Security Commission welcomed Mr. Michael S. Linnington, Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency; and Ann Mills-Griffiths, Chairman of the Board, National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, who briefed the commission on the progress of the DPAA and noted the challenges that lay ahead for the agency charged with the accounting and recovery of missing DoD personnel.

The speakers provided membership with very informative updates regarding overcoming successive budget crises, the remaining obstacle to increasing the pace and scope of accounting efforts while ensuring the safety of field recovery teams. Mr. Linnington provided his personal experience regarding the establishment of the U.S. – Russian Joint Commission following his recent 10 day trip to Moscow. The Russian government is developing an archive of records that DPAA will be allowed access to which will greatly increase records retrieval and updating.

Mr. Linnington updated the commission on DPAA staff relocations domestically and worldwide. He also provided and updated list MIAs by each war: WWII: 73182; Cold War: 126; Korea: 7824; Vietnam: 1623; and Current Conflicts: 6. He also announces that the new 130,000 square foot headquarters building located at Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam was up and running with 50,000 square feet of laboratory space.

Ann Mills-Griffiths highlighted challenges the accounting faces due to political insecurities. The unsettling conditions created by China island building in the South China Sea have created more military to military interaction which has helped with recovery efforts in neighboring countries. She also express strong support for Director Linnington and applauded the inclusion of The American Legion at DPAA family updates.

5. Business Session

The business session commenced by Chairman Schlee leading the Commission in reviewing two resolutions that were referred by the 2015 National Security Convention Committee, Resolution 25: Merge PX/BX Commissaries and Resolution 92: Retirement Benefits and Survivor Benefit (SBP) Gap. After a discussion the Commission voted to reject Resolution 25. After further discussion, the Commission decided that the intent of Resolution 92 could be resolved by communicating its message to DFAS by staff and it was therefore voted that the resolution be disposed of administratively.

The business session continued with remarks from Mr. Larry Romo, Director of the Selective Service System. Mr. Romo brought to the attention of the Commission two House Bills recently introduced with language to repeal the selective service system. These bills were introduced following implementation of the DoD policy allowing females to service in combat arms professions. He explained that the system not only ensure manpower when needed but acts as a show of strength to our enemies at a cost of only $23 million. Changes have been made to improve the system such as college students would have to serve once they finish their current semester if selected. The system is now implemented as a lottery and is tested monthly. The need for the system was emphasized with by addressing growing threats in China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorism.

Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee Chairman George Wehrli and members of the Committee reviewed 26 Law Officer of the Year packages and 20 Firefighter of the Year packages. Once the 10 regional winners were selected they selected the National Law Enforcement Officer and National Firefighter of the Year winners. The 2016 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year winner is from the Department of Illinois and the National Firefighter of the Year winner is from the Department of Florida.

Chairman Schlee provided the Commission members with a summary of the National Security Commission Outline of Authorizations. He reviewed assigned responsibilities covered in the summary as they are divided by the Commission, Committees, and Council. Chairman Schlee also addressed the workload associated with the renewal year for
resolutions. In preparation, the Commission and Committee chairmen will be performing a review of all positions prior to National Convention.

To round out the meeting Commission Chairman Mike Schlee provided the Commission with a quick overview of the upcoming plans for this year’s National Security Commission Pre-Convention Trip. Deputy Director Freddy Gessner indicated a visit to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base will be the likely destination for the commission’s tour just prior the 2016 National Convention which will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Report: National Security Commission
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman
May 4 – 5, 2016

You have received a copy of the report of the meeting of the National Commission during the Washington Conference which took place on February 23rd and 24th. During the business session, two resolutions were considered and our recommended action is in the addendum to this report.

The National Security Commission and its seven committees along with the council continue to review developments in the national security and foreign relations arenas. There are more than 80 active national security resolutions with legislative intent. These active resolutions have been sent to seven the Committee Chairmen for review, assessment, and update for recommendations to Convention Committees at 98th National Convention - legislative renewal year. The following are updates on several critical areas for your review:

**Defense Resourcing**

While temporarily on hold, the biggest challenge to the military's readiness is sequestration. Sequestration is a provision of the Budget Control Act of 2011 that imposes across-the-board spending cuts if Congress and the White House cannot agree on more targeted cuts aimed at reducing the budget deficit. The uncertain and restrictive budget environment is forcing the military to make tough choices.

The ripple effect of sequestration through the years causes services to cancel deployments, maintenance is delayed, and worst of all is losing quality person. The Marine Corps is no longer in a healthy position to generate readiness while simultaneously resetting all of its equipment. The Army is forced to accept considerable risk by reducing its end strength while deferring modernization programs and infrastructure investments. The Air Force broke faith with civilian airmen because of furloughs. The Navy struggles with balancing readiness with critical modernization investments.

In regards to Russia, Defense Secretary Carter stated during a hearing before the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee last week that despite the progress we’ve made together since the end of the Cold War, Russia has in recent years appeared intent to erode the principled international order that has served us, our friends and allies, the international community, and also Russia itself so well for so long.

He also stated that to reinforce our NATO allies and build our deterrence posture in the face of Russia’s aggression, this budget significantly increases funding for our European Reassurance Initiative to make a total investment of $3.4 billion for FY 2017 – more than quadrupling the $789 million that we requested last year – allowing us to increase the amount of prepositioned equipment sets in Europe as well as the number of U.S. forces, including Reserve forces, rotating through Europe to engage with friends and allies.

Last week, the House Armed Services Committee passed its version of the fiscal year 2017 defense authorization bill that seeks to shift $18 billion of overseas contingency operations funding into the Pentagon's base budget to pay for unrequested weapon procurements and troop increases.
Women in Combat Roles
In the coming weeks, the Army is set to commission 22 female lieutenants into ground combat roles, a first for the service. The move comes just months after Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter opened all jobs in the military to women, including roles that were previously closed such as those in the infantry and artillery fields. According to the release, the women are about to graduate from their respective ROTC programs and service academies. One woman is currently in Officer Candidate School.

The American Legion’s position states that the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position specific standard depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.

Nine women will head to the infantry while 13 will commission as armor officers. Armor means the officers will be in charge of vehicles such as the M1A2 Abrams main battle tank and M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle.

Selective Service
The House Armed Services Committee will include instructions to examine the Selective Service program's viability and possible “alternatives” as part of its review of the annual defense authorization bill. The agency's activities cost taxpayers roughly $23 million each year.

The move comes following months of hand-wringing over whether women will be forced to register for the draft as part of the military's plans to open combat jobs to all troops regardless of gender.

The American Legion’s position states that the retention of the Selective Service Registration Program as being in the best interests of all Americans, and its maintenance is a proven cost-effective, essential, and rapid means of reconstituting the required forces to protect our national security interests as well as supporting legislation to amend the Selective Service Registration Program to include the mandatory registration of females between the ages of 18-25 years of age.

Force Health
The military must not lose sight of its most important quality, which is retaining high quality people. Today there is a mismatch between the pace of worldwide global operations and the demands on U.S. forces and available resources, which has steadily fallen since 2012 following withdrawal of most ground troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Army end strength was 490,000 in FY 2015 and will fall to 420,000 by FY 2017.

To further add to retention, last year Congress enacted military retirement reform and is promising to reform TRICARE. The Defense Resale Board has set up pilot programs to study variable pricing options for defense commissaries and exchanges in order to cut costs.

The Joint Chiefs has expressed concern over the proportion of budget dollars for military compensation versus other needs of the military. The Marine Corps reported compensation for military and civilian personnel is 68 percent of its budget. Military men and women are not overcompensated and the primary reward of service is anything but financial.

ISIL/War on Terrorism
U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced last month the United States will send 217 additional troops to Iraq to serve as advisers and trainers to Iraqi forces. The new forces will raise U.S. troop presence in Iraq to over 4,000. As the war continues we remember the recent attacks on Brussels which claimed 32 lives and injured dozens more.

Retired General Petraeus recently said the formulation of sound national policy requires finding the right overarching concepts. Getting the “big ideas” right is particularly important when major developments appear to have invalidated the concepts upon which
previous policy and strategy were based — which now appears to be the case in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Ungoverned spaces in a region stretching from West Africa through the Middle East and into Central Asia will be exploited by Islamic extremists who want to establish sanctuaries in which they can enforce their extremist version of Islam and from which they can conduct terrorist attacks.

It is also apparent that the attacks and other activities of such extremists will not be confined to the areas or regions in which they are located. Rather, as in the case of Syria, the actions of the extremist groups are likely to spew instability, extremism, violence and refugees far beyond their immediate surroundings, posing increasingly difficult challenges for our partners in the region, our European allies and even our homeland.

Partners from the Islamic world are of particular importance. Indeed, they have huge incentives to be involved, as the ongoing struggles are generally not clashes between civilizations. Rather, what we are seeing is more accurately a clash within a civilization, that of the Islamic world. And no leaders have more to lose should extremism gather momentum than those of predominantly Islamic states.

Success against these extremists will require sustained commitment, not just of our military forces, but also of the capabilities of other departments and agencies. A comprehensive approach is neither easy nor cheap. But that is also true of the actions we have to take as inadequately governed spaces become ungoverned and in turn are exploited by transnational extremists. The Long War is going to be an ultramarathon, but we and our partners have the ability to respond in a thoughtful and prudent manner.

The National Security Commission thanks National Commander Dale Barnett, our NEC Liaison committee and the distinguished members of the National Executive Committee for their continuing support for Commission efforts to take care of the troops and "provide for the common defense".

Addendum A

Reject

Resolution No. 25 (PA) (2015 Natl. Conv.): Merge PX/BX Commissaries

Dispose of Administratively

Resolution No. 92 (NC) (2015 Natl. Conv.): Retirement Benefits and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Gap

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION COMMISSION
Ralph P. Bozella, Colorado, Chairman
Louis Celli, Massachusetts, Director

The following report covers the activities of the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission and its staff during the program year ending June 30, 2016.

The Ninety-Seventh Annual National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland and the Fall and Spring Meetings of the National Executive Committee approved certain positions expressed in resolutions submitted to those bodies through the Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation and the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, respectively. The approved resolutions are set forth as follows:
## 2015 National Convention
Baltimore, MD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Black Hills National Cemetery Expansion</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oppose Closure of the VA Black Hills Health Care System's Hot Springs Campus</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>In Vitro Fertilization</td>
<td>PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Agreements with Non-VA Providers</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Fit to Serve Initiative</td>
<td>NM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Compensation for Veterans Requiring Hearing Aids for Service Connected Heating Loss</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Restore VA’s Informal Claims and Appeals Process</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Increased Accessibility to VA Claims Pertaining to Non-Disability Related Matters for Accredited Representatives</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Extend Dental Care to Veterans with Service Connection of 50 % or More</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Complementary and Alternative Medicine</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Non-Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Care</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Department of Veterans Affairs Recruitment &amp; Retention</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Priority Care for Medal of Honor Recipients</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Fiduciary Responsibility</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Local Accredited Representative Access to Veterans Benefits Management System Decisions</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Reiteration of the System Worth Saving Program</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2015 Fall National Executive Committee Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Veteran Caretaker Stipend</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Honoring Those Who Have Earned the Medal of Honor</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Women Veterans</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission held three meetings during the period September 1, 2015, through May 1, 2016.

The Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee met on September 1, 2015 during the National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland and a report was subsequently made to the National Executive Committee relative to the Commission’s meeting.

The National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission met for the 93rd consecutive year in Washington, DC, on February 22, 2016, in conjunction with the 56th Annual Washington Conference.

A special executive subcommittee of the VA&R Commission was called in by National Commander Dale Barnette to discuss important and immediately relevant issues relating to veterans healthcare and benefits met at National Headquarters, May 2 - 3, 2016, for the purpose of considering those matters, which had previously been referred for study, and to discuss a broad range of other veteran related matters. A report of that meeting was presented to the National Executive Committee on May 4, 2016.

**National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Legislative Activities**

From July 2015 - June 2016, The VA&R Division participated in a total of twenty (21) hearings. Please refer to the following table for more information about the content and timeline of the hearings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Support for Veteran Quality of Life</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Increase the Transparency of Asbestos Claims</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Reinstate Enrollment of Priority Group 8g Veterans and Dependents into the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Patient Enrollment System</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Oppose Closing or Privatization of Department of Veterans Affairs Health-Care System</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Consolidation of Department of Veterans Affairs Care in the community Programs</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rescinding Resolutions from the Veterans Affairs &amp; Rehabilitation Commission</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2016 Spring National Executive Committee Meeting**

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<th>Resolution Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rescinding Resolutions From The Veterans Affairs &amp; Rehabilitation Commission</td>
<td>VA&amp;R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Person Involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 14, 2015</td>
<td>Hearing on Pending Legislation</td>
<td>Ian de Planque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15, 2015</td>
<td>“Exploring VA’s Administration on Individual Unemployability Benefits”</td>
<td>Ian de Planque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 16, 2015</td>
<td>Hearing on Pending Legislation</td>
<td>Roscoe Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 6, 2015</td>
<td>Hearing on Pending Legislation</td>
<td>Louis Celli, Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28, 2015</td>
<td>Hearing on VA Mental Health: Ensuring Access to Care</td>
<td>Roscoe Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 17, 2015</td>
<td>Hearing on Pending Legislation</td>
<td>LaRanda Holt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2, 2015</td>
<td>Consolidation of Non-VA Care Programs</td>
<td>Roscoe Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 23, 2016</td>
<td>“VA’s Transformation Strategy: Examining the Plan to Modernize VA”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10, 2016</td>
<td>“U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2017”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 11, 2016</td>
<td>“Billing and Reimbursement for Care in the Community under VA’s Plan to Consolidate Non-VA Care Programs”</td>
<td>Roscoe Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 23, 2016</td>
<td>“FY 2017 Budget for Veterans’ Programs and FY 2018 Advance Appropriations Request”</td>
<td>Louis Celli, Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15, 2016</td>
<td>Hearing on Pending &amp; Draft Legislation</td>
<td>Louis Celli, Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16, 2016</td>
<td>“Draft Legislation to Improve the Authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to Hire and Retain Physicians and Other Employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs”</td>
<td>Roscoe Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16, 2016</td>
<td>“VA Cybersecurity and IT Oversight”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22, 2016</td>
<td>“Choice Consolidation Leveraging Provider Networks to Increase Veteran Access”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

The VA&R Division is managed by Louis Celli, Director, VA&R. VA&R is responsible for directing all matters involving veterans’ health care issues, veterans related matters to include compensation, pension, disability indemnity compensation, claims submitted to the Board of Veterans Appeals and Special Claims Unit, the Appeals Management Center, all satellite offices to include Benefits Delivery at Discharge offices, PMD/DMC/Insurance, the Department Service Officer School, liaison to the Department Service Officers located in the 57 regional offices, the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service program, resolutions, and National. To assist him in carrying out these duties, he is assisted by a Deputy Director for Benefits, a Deputy Director for Health Care, a Deputy Director for MEB/PEB & DoD and an office assistant.

Informational Services/Distribution of VA&R Releases

The American Legion has several pamphlets and brochures available upon request to veterans and organizations in need.

The Veterans’ Affairs and Rehabilitation Division offers the following pamphlets:

- The American Legion Guide
- Women Veterans – Identifies Risk, Services, and Prevention
- What to do before a Veteran Dies – A Guide to Pre-Planning
- Veterans Serving Veterans – A Summary on The American Legion Volunteer Program in the Community
- Agent Orange Benefits & Program – A guide for Vietnam Veterans and their Families
- Gulf War Era Benefits & Programs – A guide for Veterans and their Families
- Know Your Benefits
- Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Handbook
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- The Post Service Officer Guide
- Code of Conduct (for accredited service officers)

The handbooks and pamphlets, as well as those in regards to the Department of Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program are also distributed at seminars, conferences, and Department Conventions. Supplies of these and other VA&R pamphlets are maintained at The American Legion headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana and
distributed upon request through The American Legion Washington Headquarters at 1608 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. Shipping is complimentary and requests can be made by calling Headquarters directly at 202-861-2700 or by email at Wkennedy@legion.org.

Report From the VA&R Cemetery Committee

The National Cemetery Committee met on August 29, 2015, in Room 339, Level 300 to hold a panel discussion on "Advancing Memorial Affairs into the 21st Century." We The Committee heard from Ronald Walters, Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), who briefed the committee with an overview of the NCA, and recognized the partnership with the Department of the Army, the Department of the Interior and the American Battlefield Monuments Commission. Renea E. Yates, Deputy Superintendent, Cemetery Administrations, Arlington National Cemetery provided the committee with an overview of Arlington National Cemetery, the process involved with interment scheduling, the three types of burial honors available: Military Spouses and Family Members, Standard Honors, and Full Military Funeral Honors. Ms. Yates also discussed Arlington’s Millennium Project which is estimated to be complete in FY 2016.

On February 22, 2016, the National Cemetery Committee was given a presentation by Dr. Yehia, Mark Bilosz, and Dr. Ronald Walters; Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. Dr. Ronald Walters had long range plan goals for veterans and eligible family members will have increased access to burial benefits. More veterans and eligible family members will use VA burial and memorial benefits, veterans will be memorialized through enhanced tributes befitting their service and sacrifice to the nation, stakeholders will place greater trust in NCA based on enhanced accountability, and stakeholders will be served more efficiently and effectively by NCA’s internal capacity.

Mark Bilosz set goals for compensation service for backlog reduction, 98% quality, and 125 day processing. In summary, the claims backlog was down, claims backlog is down 87% from peak, quality is 98% in all but one of eight categories (one at 97.5%), and average days pending is 91 days.

Government Life Insurance, Pension & Debt Management Activities

The United States Government, acting through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), directly administers four life insurance programs for veterans of the World War I, World War II and Korean War periods, as well as two special on-going programs for veterans in certain service-connected disabled categories. These programs are administered under the titles of United States Government Life Insurance (USGLI) for World War I era veterans, National Service Life Insurance (NSLI) for World War II era, Korean War era and Service-Disabled veterans (SDVI - Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance), and Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) for totally disabled veterans who are approved for grants for specially adapted housing purposes by the VA. NSLI and SDVI programs currently have some 723,229 policies in force as of June 30, 2016, with a combined life insurance coverage of some $ 9.5 billion. NSLI processes some 100,000-120,000 claims annually in addition to a very high number of other policy transactions as the program’s policies are individual in nature and are composed of diverse plans of insurance. The VMLI program insures some 2625 veterans with approximately $340 million dollars of coverage in force. Currently these programs are operated out of the VA Insurance Center in Philadelphia, PA. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners approved the use of the 2001 Commissioners Standard Mortality Table as the new mortality standard for life insurance. Since the law allows the VA Secretary to set the mortality table for the VMLI program, VA began using the 2001 table, rather than the previous 1958 table, effective October 1, 2006. This reduced premiums for the program an average of 37 percent.

In addition to the life insurance programs directly operated by the VA, the Department also has supervisory authority and responsibility over two other major government life
insurance program issues. These are the Servicemember’s Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) programs. These programs have provided insurance protection, since 1965 and 1970 respectively, to active duty and reserve military personnel (SGLI), spouses and dependents, and to separated veterans and to retired and separated reservists (VGLI). The SGLI and VGLI programs are administered by the Prudential Insurance Company at a center in Roseland, NJ (the Office of Servicemembers Group Life Insurance – OSGLI), with all administration and other program expenses being paid by the policyholders from a portion of their insurance premiums, save for the extra hazard mortality experience of wartime periods when general tax revenues take over. These insurance issues are solely group Term insurance without dividends, disability benefits, or diverse types of permanent plans with equity values such as the individual policy contracts contained in the VA’s directly administered program. On June 30, 2016, SGLI provided some 5.06 million active duty and reserve personnel, spouses and dependents with more than $1.2 trillion of life insurance coverage, while VGLI covered some 431,000 veterans with insurance in excess of $70.9 billion. Of these policy accounts the OSGLI Center in Roseland, NJ maintains only VGLI, with the various military service departments maintaining the rest. The OSGLI center processes between 2500-3500 death claims annually with minimal other transactions due to the very limited nature of the coverage as group term insurance only. Currently, claims arising from military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia are processed in less than two business days from the time the last required document is received at OSGLI. In 1992, VGLI became lifetime renewable instead of the single five year term previously in effect. The amount of VGLI a veteran can hold cannot be in excess of the amount of SGLI he or she held in service. In 1997, retired Reservists, instead of being insured under the SGLI program until age 60 or the receipt of their first retired pay check, were merged into the VGLI program to allow them the option of retaining their coverage as long as desired. Reservists leaving reserve service without the amount of time needed for full retirement may be covered under VGLI, if desired. In addition, veterans are now permitted to convert their SGLI/VGLI insurance, in partial amounts at different times or in whole, to a private plan of insurance with a participating commercial insurance carrier as they leave service, or at any time they are in the VGLI program, without having to wait a stipulated period as was previously the case. Effective April 1, 2001, those entering active duty were automatically covered for a full $250,000 under SGLI as authorized by Public Law 106-419, and members of the Individual Ready Reserve who have volunteered for assignment to a mobilization category were also made eligible for SGLI coverage under that law. In addition, Public Law 107-14 authorized other program enhancements to the SGLI program, effective November 1, 2001, which allows up to $100,000 in spousal coverage on a paid premium basis, and provides $10,000 free life insurance coverage for a member’s children. These dependent coverage still cannot, at present, be carried over into the VGLI program and cannot be doubled in the case of both parents being in service. However, while the member’s SGLI is in force, spousal coverage can be converted to a private plan of insurance with a participating commercial company upon written application in the same manner as a VGLI policy may be so converted. The American Legion insurance unit presented supporting testimony at that time on these legislative changes as they improved greatly the range of financial options available to veterans in these programs, not only at the time of their separation from service, but in later years as their life situation changed as well, and as they permit the SGLI and VGLI programs to more effectively compete with private insurers who have the privilege of excluding applicants as desired and who may, in the case of certain military associations, be co-located on military bases.

New SGLI legislation was enacted in May 2005. Public Law (PL) 109-13, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief of 2005, was signed into law May 11, 2005, and contained provisions for increases in the Dept. of Defense (DOD) Death Gratuity, for increases in the amount of maximum coverage under the Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program,
and for a new SGLI group policy rider for Traumatic Injury Protection. The SGLI
Traumatic Injury Protection Rider became effective December 1, 2005, and currently
provides over $215.6 billion in traumatic injury coverage as per a published schedule of
losses caused by such physical injuries. On November 26, 2008, VA issued new regulations
as a result of extensive reviews to expand the TSGLI schedule of losses and the time period
involved. Additions to the TSGLI schedule included expansion of definitions for total and
permanent loss of sight, hearing, speech, and various types of paralysis. Other additions
included certain types of amputation, limb salvage, facial reconstruction, burns, injuries
resulting from authorized use of controlled substances and traumatic brain injury effects.
Effective September 1, 2005, regular SGLI coverage was automatically increased to
$400,000 from the previous $250,000, and is the current maximum amount of SGLI
coverage permitted. Service members electing lesser amounts must do so in $50,000
increments. Spousal and dependent coverage was not impacted by the legislation. The Act
specified certain spousal and beneficiary notification requirements for members changing
beneficiary designations or electing lesser amounts of coverage. The Act also provided for
the group traumatic injury insurance rider to be attached to the group coverage provided
under SGLI. The premium cost of which to the insured was to be $1.00 per month. This
injury protection ranges from $25,000 to $100,000 in accordance with a disability schedule
which has been published and which is composed of a list of physical traumatic injuries
involving significant loss of use of physical or mental abilities caused by such injury.
Coverage under this rider began December 1, 2005. A retroactive provision for qualifying
injuries (Iraq and Afghanistan service) from October 7, 2001, to the effective date was also
provided for. The Secretary of Defense certifies to the SGLI center the individuals
qualifying for retroactive payments. Public Law 111-275, enacted October 13, 2010,
expanded this provision to include TSGLI coverage for all covered losses incurred on
active duty regardless of location to be effective October 1, 2011. Servicemembers must
be covered by SGLI to have this rider, and for members insured under SGLI the rider is
mandatory. Rider coverage ceases at midnight on the date the member separates from the
uniformed service. No retroactive period was contained in the legislation for the $150,000
SGLI increase, but this was addressed through the Dept. of Defense’s Death Gratuity
benefit instead, as insurance underwriting requirements did not permit new coverage
increases to be applied retroactively.

On September 30, 2005, the SGLI Enhancement Act of 2005 (PL 109-80) was enacted
which made permanent the increase in the maximum allowable SGLI regular coverage
from $250,000 to $400,000, and which included various spousal notification requirements
for beneficiary changes. This last requirement, for an insured married at the time of making
a beneficiary election, that the Secretary of Defense notify the insured’s spouse should the
insured at any time take action to either reduce the amount of coverage or to name a
beneficiary other than the insured’s spouse, did not meet with the support of The American
Legion. It has historically been the belief of The American Legion that this type of
fundamental insurance benefit is a special contract between the servicemember (or veteran
in the case of veteran’s coverage) and the federal government, and is a matter personal and
sacrosanct to those who serve (or have served) the nation in uniform, and that an insured’s
beneficiary information should not be released to third parties without the consent of the
insured. Such spousal notification, however, does not affect a member’s right to elect or
change his/her beneficiary designation or amount of SGLI coverage at any time.

Further legislative changes in the SGLI program included PL 109-163, enacted
January 6, 2006, which authorized the payment of an allowance to servicemembers serving
in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom for an amount equal to the
premium of $150,000 of SGLI coverage, affording them $150,000 of free SGLI coverage
provided they did not decline such coverage, and PL 109-233 enacted June 15, 2006. PL
109-233 extends the duration of SGLI coverage from one to two years for servicemembers
who are totally disabled upon the date of their separation from active duty or reserve status,
effective upon the date of enactment for members released before October 1, 2011.
Servicemembers who were released within one year of the enactment date were also eligible for this extended coverage period. Public Law 111-275, enacted October 1, 2010, makes this extension permanent. This legislation also provided the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the sole authority to determine the period of time between the date of a traumatic event and the date a member suffers a qualifying loss for all losses under the Traumatic SGLI (TSGLI) program. The law also removed the previously existing statutory requirement that quadriplegia, paraplegia, or hemiplegia occur within one year of the traumatic injury. For all losses, this period has now been extended to two years.

The American Legion’s National VA&R insurance unit at the Philadelphia, PA center had initiated and worked with the VA insurance management staff to provide added protection to those veterans leaving service in a totally disabled and life-threatening status, to attempt to ensure these veterans do not lose coverage (as happens periodically) due to misunderstanding certain requirements of the SGLI to VGLI transfer system stemming from inconsistencies in the manner these are explained to them as they out process from various military facilities, or failing to respond in a timely manner to initial insurance invitations and premium billings, etc. Recommended safeguards included such items as automatic coverage and premium deduction start-ups from military retired pay or VA disability compensation, policy liens for past due premiums, and closer contacts between the SGLI/VGLI administering office and veterans in this category. DVA insurance management completed a staff study through the military service departments, the Defense Manpower Data Center, DPC Austin and OSGLI on the methods such individuals can be identified, and has created an Outreach program to contact by telephone and with additional letters veterans in this class, and advise them of their VGLI options as needed. Currently, separating servicemembers who have been discharged on disability retirement at a rating of 50% to 100% by their branch of service are contacted. Of those contacted by phone, over 80% apply for either the SGLI Disability Extension (free coverage for two years) or VGLI coverage. In June 2011 the VA Insurance Center opened a formal, fully staffed Outreach Center in Philadelphia to expand these operations. An on-line SGLI/VGLI manual is available to all military out processing centers and veterans to ensure these have immediate access to correct information concerning the requirements for veterans being separated to convert their in-service SGLI coverage to VGLI coverage, and in February 2004 a detailed Insurance Needs Calculator was added to the VA Insurance website, for veterans to use to assess their life insurance needs and compare VGLI coverage to other insurance options. The Calculator includes VA, Social Security and military benefits in the final assessment. VGLI policyholders also have the ability now to access their policy information through the VA website as well, using passwords and policy information for all programs the Department of Veterans Affairs administers and/or supervises, some 6.22 million insurance policies for military personnel, spouses, dependents and veterans, with a total in-force coverage of over $1.23 trillion.

In the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (SDVI) program, many disabled veterans annually continue to take advantage of the new supplemental Service-Disabled insurance provided in the legislative changes of 1992, whereby an additional Supplemental $30,000 of coverage may be purchased by those veterans having a basic Service-Disabled policy and who become totally disabled before age 65. This option has a limited time period of one year from a grant of premium waiver and if application is made before age 65. The American Legion VA&R insurance office continues to maintain a special notification system for those veterans who choose The American Legion as their representative and who are applying for Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (SDVI) coverage to ensure they are informed as early as possible of these additional benefits. The notification system has been expanded to include compilation of a database of those qualifying for supplemental coverage and the release of additional reminder notifications to them prior to expiration of their supplemental insurance option. This is particularly needful as the current VA system may be faulty in communicating information on benefits such as disability premium waivers and supplemental coverage to veterans who may qualify for it, and who may very
well be in life-threatening (and therefore time constrained) conditions. A special activity was initiated in this benefit area in 2004 and continued afterward by the VA Compensation and Pension Service to address concerns that many service-connected disabled veterans were not being informed enough on the program. A mailing on SDVI notification was included with the annual cost-of-living increase letters, reaching approximately 2.3 million veterans in 2004-2005, resulting in many thousands of new applications being received. This continues with insurance invitations being sent out on virtually all ratings actions. SDVI applications have also been made available on the VA’s Insurance website through an Autoform program whereby applications can be made, saved, printed for mailing or submitted electronically as desired. This new tool became active March 5, 2004.

The VA Insurance Center continues their on-going effort to provide better service and program enhancements to their veteran policyholders by periodically updating their computer and communication systems, both as part of the overall VA area networks and through the Internet, and all records and transaction activities, previously done on paper, into their on-line computer systems. Beginning in summer 2001, the VA Insurance Center accelerated a planned program of transforming their insurance operation into a wholly computerized system no longer utilizing any paper insurance files, but using imaging technology instead to replace paper files with electronic ones. The impetus for this was to create space in the Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center for one of the three regional Pension Centers which have been organized to assist in the reduction of the national backlog in compensation and pension cases. The insurance system, known as VICTARS (Veterans Insurance Claims Tracking and Response System) permits on-screen display of all file documents that would previously have been maintained in a paper insurance folder, and gives VA insurance specialists the ability to input and process claims, transactions and responses to inquiries with far greater speed than any earlier system used to date, and to maintain a full history of such in the policyholder’s new electronic file. Currently, over 6 million images are available to insurance specialists via their desktop computers. All previous paper insurance folders (over 2.5 million) have been retired to a nearby Federal Records Center, but are still available for recall as may be needed on certain cases. This accomplishment has resulted in savings of some $1 million annually. Insurance services are further augmented by automated assistance and call routing facilities added to a toll free number (800-669-8477). Faxed correspondence, claims, and transaction requests are acceptable for VA Insurance purposes. Additionally, in accordance with the federal initiative to have all government disbursements done by Direct Deposit (Electronic Transfer of Funds) the VA Insurance Center has completed actions for the direct deposit of monthly insurance installment awards to beneficiaries and those policyholders receiving monthly annuities. All monthly insurance award/annuity payments are by electronic transfer of funds to these insurance payees. In this vein, all policy loan, dividend refund and cash surrender payments are also sent to an insured’s bank account if VA benefits are or were on direct deposit, or if an insured is paying premiums by automatic deduction from a checking account unless requested otherwise. New settlement claim forms for death settlements contain blocks for beneficiaries to include bank information for EFT payment. As with the VGLI program, NSLI/SDVI policyholders may now also access their account information through the VA’s insurance website with a PIN number, and perform certain transactions such as policy loan applications. For VMLI there is now also an on-line Insurance Needs Calculator, similar to that for VGLI, available as well.

Public Law 111-275, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2010, has made the following changes in government insurance programs for veterans and active duty personnel.

Effective October 1, 2011, the maximum amount of life insurance coverage permitted under the Supplemental Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance program (SDVI) increased from the present limit of $20,000 to a new maximum of $30,000. Supplemental SDVI is available to veterans who are approved for a basic SDVI policy ($10,000 maximum), who qualify for a disability waiver of premiums on the basic policy, and who make an application for Supplemental insurance before age 65 and within one year of the date of
notification by the VA of the disability premium waiver. Totally disabled veterans who meet the qualifying criteria can, therefore, be able to have a maximum of $40,000 coverage in force.

Also, effective October 1, 2011, the Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) program increased in coverage from the previous $90,000 limit to a new maximum of $150,000. On January 1, 2012, this increased further to $200,000 in the amount of coverage permitted.

Additionally, six months from the date of enactment of PL 111-275, those veterans under age 60 who are insured under the Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) program have an opportunity once every five years, beginning on the one year anniversary of the date of entry into the program, to purchase further VGLI coverage in the amount of $25,000; the overall amount of coverage held, however, cannot exceed $400,000; the maximum allowed by law for Service members Group Life Insurance (SGLI).

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, the legislation also provided for an expansion of Traumatic Injury SGLI (TSGLI) coverage for the retroactive period of October 7, 2001, to November 30, 2005, provided by Public Law 109-233 for service members incurring covered losses in Operations Iraqi Freedom and/or Enduring Freedom. Public Law 111-275 expanded TSGLI coverage for covered losses for the retroactive period for all such losses incurred on active duty, regardless of location. The effective date of this expansion was also October 1, 2011. The loss of a dominant hand is added to the TSGLI schedule of covered losses by this legislation.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Service Units

VA Insurance Center at Philadelphia, PA and St. Paul, MN DMC Center

The American Legion Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission Staff at Philadelphia consists of a Chief of Insurance Activities/Insurance Representative and a Pension Benefits Assistant Director/Representative. Associated offices at the St. Paul and Milwaukee VA Pension Centers have one VA&R Pension Assistant Director with Pension Benefits Representative at each of the St. Paul and Milwaukee centers. Recent reviews by the VA Inspector General (VA IG) office of the Philadelphia Pension Center uncovered discrepancies and incorrect claims processing within the Philadelphia VA Center. These have been addressed by appropriate reorganization of activities and the replacement of certain managerial personnel. VA IG continues to review and oversee these solutions and perform on-site inspections. The VA Pension Centers have also moved to activate a centralized mail processing operation to facilitate processing of paper mail into the VA electronic systems.

The Chief of Insurance Activities/Insurance Representative must have a thorough knowledge of government life insurance laws, regulations, and transaction and adjudication procedures, and be able to analyze them correctly in order to properly represent insured veterans and their beneficiaries. The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Director and other interested personnel are kept informed on policy matters, changes in VA administrative procedures and all related areas to include new legislative initiatives. NSLI re-open periods for service-disabled and non-service disabled veterans with increased face value coverage continues to be an American Legion legislative effort. Coordination has also been effected with the VA Pension Center management in both Philadelphia, St. Paul and Milwaukee for the creation of a system whereby the national VA&R staff personnel can process pension inquiries from Department and Veterans Service Officers as they may require.

Daily operations involve a full range of insurance services to include the representation of insured veterans and their beneficiaries, the review of insurance case files and supporting evidence and Claims files as required, the furnishing of status reports and account assistance to insured, beneficiaries, accredited field representatives and VA adjudicative and accounts personnel, close liaison with Department Service Officers and other field personnel to ensure prompt and complete service, and the input to, review of,
and where necessary the correction of VA actions and records both on cases involving
disability and death claims, and on those involving any of a wide variety of insurance
accounting and financial transactions that occur on active and matured accounts. General
insurance information and guidance is provided to field service officers across the United
States, along with assistance in the preparation of insurance appeals and claims submittals.
Coordination with VA executive and program management personnel is conducted on both
individual cases and broad policy/administrative matters. A telephone fax capability added
to the Philadelphia office has greatly expedited claims processing by enabling rapid receipt
of documents needed to complete transactions and claims that would otherwise be
significantly delayed due to mailing times, particularly in emergency cases. The
Philadelphia office remains heavily involved in the large increase in SDVI applications
beginning in 2004 and 2005, occasioned by the mass mailing of SDVI notifications to
virtually all service-connected veterans mentioned earlier. Information, staff analysis, and
testimony/comments for major legislative insurance benefit increases, is provided to the
Director, National VA&R Commission for presentation to Congress as needed.

The St. Paul office provides similar operations, staff representation and nationwide
veterans’ service in the field of VA Debt Management nationally, and for Pension
operations for the western third of the nation.

A major new addition to the Philadelphia National VA&R unit occurred effective
January 2010 with the acquisition of an experienced service officer for the new role of
Pension Benefits Representative, to include all necessary computer and high capacity Fax
equipment. A new National Staff representative was also added to the VA Regional Office
and PMC in Milwaukee for the middle third of the nation as well. The mission of the PMC
representatives is to assist in all VA pension, DIC, accrued benefits, burial and dual
entitlement claims where The American Legion holds power of attorney.

New web-based sources, provided by the Director, VA&R Commission, and by the
VA Pension Center, have now been implemented to enable the processing of incoming
paper and faxed claims to be received via E-Mail in pdf format, and to be submitted
electronically into the VA system to significantly reduce paper usage, related files storage
and processing time. For example, a paperwork reduction of over 95% has been
experienced in the Philadelphia unit, with service officer review and submittal times to VA
vastly speeded up.

All offices have obtained access to the new VA benefits online systems which came
on board in 2013: the Stakeholders Entry Portal (SEP), the Veterans Benefits Management
System (VBMS) and e-Benefits.

As of July 2016, the VA Pension Maintenance Centers had 117,252 pending cases
(61,635 in Philadelphia, 27,330 in St. Paul, and 28,287 in Milwaukee). Of these, The
American Legion represented 14,808 cases (7,930 – Philadelphia, 4,222 – Milwaukee, and
2,656 - St. Paul).

For the period August 1, 2015 to end of July 2016 the following activities of The
American Legion’s Philadelphia, St. Paul, and Milwaukee offices were reported:

Insurance, Pension & Debt Management:
(DMC = Debt Management Center)

Letters Received: 16,484
Letters Sent: 22,292
Disability Insurance Claims: 2,353
Death Insurance Claims: 291
Insurance Folders Reviewed: 2,583
In-Force Insurance Policy Accounts Reviewed: 6,080
New Insurance Accounts – SDVI: 5,083
Telephone Contacts: 10,996
Personal Contacts: 7,803
Submittal Memorandums & Reports: 4,195
DVA Case Responses Processed: Insurance, Pension and Debt
Management Cases: 18,160
*Live Claims, Evidence and Other Submittals Presented: 81,445
*Excludes death claims and includes policy transactions such as dividend, loan and premium actions, plan conversions, cash surrenders, refunds, beneficiary changes, disability claims with related medical and legal evidence, Wills, estate documents, master record data changes, general inquiries, Debt Management and Pension case claims and supporting documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMC Original Claims</td>
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<td>DMC Grants &amp; Denials</td>
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<td>New Pension Claims</td>
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<td>Other Insurance Transactions &amp; Inquiries</td>
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<td>Pension Supporting Submittals (On-Going Cases)</td>
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<td>Pension Appeals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Pension Transactions &amp; Inquiries</td>
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**Claims Service**

The National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission provides assistance and representation to all veterans and their survivors in claims and appeals before the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as, Department of Defense Medical Evaluation Board and Physical Evaluation Board through a staff of thirty representatives.

Within the table of organization, the Deputy Director for Claims Service is responsible for the activities of the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) and Special Claims Unit. Cases at the BVA Unit are reviewed, and written briefs are submitted on the appellant’s behalf or a personal hearing is conducted before a Veterans Law Judge of the BVA with the appellant. The BVA Unit consists of a senior team leader, four team leaders, a senior medical consultant, three administrative assistants and fourteen assistant directors.

The Deputy Director for Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB) & Department of Defense (DoD) is responsible for the activities of the MEB/PEB, DoD Boards, Benefits Delivery at Discharge, Pension Maintenance Center, Life Insurance, Debt Management, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

The MEB/PEB team works directly with military members. When military members have a medical condition that may not meet medical retention standards they are referred to the Medical Evaluation Board for further evaluation by DoD. The American Legion representatives assist servicemembers by providing advocacy during the process in the form of counseling, education, writing written rebuttals on their behalf and representation at the formal hearing. Depending on the outcome, the servicemember will be medically retired or separated with severance, the choices made during the IDES process will impact them for the rest of their lives. The American Legion has one MEB/PEB representatives stationed at Joint Base Lewis/McChord, Washington.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) allows active duty service members to apply for disability compensation benefits from the VA prior to retirement or separation from military service. This program permits servicemembers with at least 60 days but no more than 180 days remaining on active duty to file. The 60 days is to allow sufficient time to complete the medical examination process prior to separation from service. The American Legion has two BDD representatives that have offices inside VA Regional Offices; one stationed in Winston-Salem, NC and one stationed in Salt Lake City, UT.

The VA Pension Management Centers (PMC) process adjustments of benefits for individuals in receipt of non-service connected disability pension, death pension and...
dependency indemnity compensation. The VA has three PMCs and the American Legion has representation to assist all claimants and DSOs; one at Milwaukee, one at Philadelphia, and two at St. Paul. The St. Paul representatives also handle debt management services for claimants that have been notified of an overpayment.

The VA Life Insurance Agency offers security in the event of the insured’s death and financial protection to survivors. The American Legion has one representative at the Philadelphia VARO to assist veterans and their survivors with life insurance.

**Military Review Boards Unit**

Title 10, United States Code, sections 1552 and 1553 provide statutory authority for the existence and operation of the Military Discharge Review Boards and the Boards for Correction of Military Records. The American Legion was instrumental in the creation of these boards shortly after World War II and has represented former servicemembers petitioning them for relief since.

During the period 1 July 2015, through 30 June 2016, the two staff members of the Military Review Boards Unit provided counsel, guidance and representation to former servicemembers seeking correction of their service record by the Army, Air Force, Navy / Marine Corps and Coast Guard discharge review and correction boards. These requests involved a wide variety of issues including character of service upgrades, reason for discharge changes, entitlement or amendment of physical disability severance or retirement, issuance or reissuance of military awards and decorations, requests for military personnel files and service medical records, and administrative corrections to official military records.

The following breaks down the individual administrative actions taken by the staff of the Military Review Board Unit in assisting former servicemembers prepare their cases for review by the respective boards.

### Case Development / Office Tasks

<table>
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<th>Communication</th>
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<td>Veteran/Other</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>Tracking Actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research/Training</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Tasks</td>
<td>2259</td>
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The following classifies the types of reviews that were presented to the respective service boards.

**Military Discharge Review Boards:**
Boards for Correction of Military Records

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Record Reviews</th>
<th>Hearing Reviews</th>
<th>Reconsiderations</th>
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<td>ARMY</td>
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Boards for Correction of Military Records

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This final breakdown provides the total number of cases received back from the boards, the number of favorable decisions and the percentage of petitions that were corrected.

Military Discharge Review Boards

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Boards for Correction of Military Records

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Each of the discharge review and correction boards is under a congressional mandate to adjudicate cases within one year from the date of acceptance. Currently, all are meeting or exceeding their requirements with timeframes ranging from 9 to 12 months.

The Military Review Board Unit also provides training material to our Department Service Officers, and instructional guides for our applicants and counsel, on an as needed basis, to veterans petitioning the Combat Related Special Compensation Boards, Physical Disability Board of Review, Awards and Decorations Boards.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

The American Legion currently has two BDD representatives, one located in Salt Lake City, Utah and the other in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

BDD is a program designed to allow a servicemember to submit a claim for disability compensation 60 to 180 days prior to separation, retirement, or release from active duty or demobilization. BDD can help you receive your disability benefits sooner, with a goal of within 60 days after release or discharge. (Titles 10 and 32).
Quick start allows a servicemember to submit a claim for disability compensation 1 to 59 days prior to separation, retirement, or release from active duty or demobilization (Title 10 or Title 32). According to VA, submitting a disability compensation claim before discharge makes it possible to receive VA disability benefits as soon as possible after separation, retirement, or demobilization.

The American Legion representatives review on average 3200 claims annually. These claims typically contain nine conditions each and are submitted from around the world by service members prior to separating from all branches of the Armed Forces. Additional research was required on some cases. The offices serve as a point of contact for veterans and Accredited Service Officers wishing to inquire about a claim, question a rating or submit documents in support of a claim. Many of the calls from veterans result from their frustration with getting prompt and accurate information from the VA assistance line and wanting some advocacy from The American Legion. These offices strive to provide immediate answers to questions or concerns. In cases that require further research, answers are normally provided within 48 hours. These offices work with little fanfare, but the positive effect on veterans and their families is enormous. Between the BDD Offices in Winston-Salem, NC, and Salt Lake City, UT, we reviewed 843 BDD Claims with 8430 issues. Each claim required reviewing the rating, C&P examination, and service treatment records. Additional research was required of some of the cases. The BDD offices also received 349 phone calls from veterans and Department Service Officers throughout the country requesting the status of a claim or questions concerning a rating. The offices provided an update for the status of the claim and provided options concerning the rating. Additionally, 75 veterans visited the offices with general VA benefit questions. The offices received and reviewed 1722 pieces of correspondence and represented 11 veterans at the Rating Board Hearing.

**Board of Veterans Appeals**

Between October 1, 2015, and August 17, 2016, The American Legion represented 8,451 claimants seeking benefits. For the claims receiving dispositions, over 79% of the claims were either determined to have been inadequately developed and prematurely denied or were erroneously denied by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

The American Legion authorized the expansion of its BVA unit in 2015, to meet the sizeable increase in appeals. To ensure that effective advocacy occurred, a thorough training program was implemented. By February 2016, all newly hired employees were fully trained and eagerly advocating for veterans.

The American Legion’s inventory of appeals at BVA was 7,382 cases in February 2016. By August 1, 2016, The BVA unit’s inventory had been reduced by 30 percent through the staff’s dogged efforts.

**Appeals Modernization Effort**

Beginning in 2015, The American Legion met with senior VA personnel to address the appeals inventory. In March 2016, VA hosted a summit to address the appeals inventory and create a solution to reduce the expanding inventory; the meeting was attended by representatives from BVA, VBA, and VSOs. Based upon these extensive discussions, VA created a framework that was submitted to Congress for their consideration. A hearing pertaining to reforming VA’s appeals structure was twice scheduled by the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and was twice cancelled within 24 hours of The American Legion’s delivery of testimony. The Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs received The American Legion’s testimony and endorsement of reforming VA’s appeals structure on May 24, 2016.

**Regional Office Action Review**

For nearly 20 years, The American Legion has conducted quality review visits at Veterans Affairs Regional Offices (VAROs) throughout the nation. Concerned that
veterans were not receiving quality adjudications pertaining to disability claims, The American Legion began dispatching seasoned and accredited representatives employed by National Headquarters with representatives from National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) to review the adjudication of claims. Historically, The American Legion has noted severe deficiencies in the quality of adjudications and has worked with VA to improve its adjudications. Additionally, The American Legion provides its findings to Congress to ensure that they provide VA with the necessary tools to properly serve veterans.

Prior to this year, The American Legion would request a selected VA regional office (VARO) to provide 50 recently adjudicated original claims holding American Legion as power of attorney. American Legion and NVLSP would carefully review the claims and notate errors in adjudication. Additionally, American Legion representatives would meet with the local department service officer (DSO) and VA employees to discuss concerns that may be occurring within the VARO.

In 2016, we will be shifting our focus upon decisions of appealed claims at the VARO. Since former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki announced VA’s intent to adjudicate claims with 98 percent accuracy within 125 days, a significant increase within the inventory of appealed claims has occurred. According to the September 28, 2015, Monday Morning Workload Report (MMWR), 312,980 appealed claims were awaiting adjudication. The September 27, 2010, MMWR indicated 205,169 appealed claims were awaiting adjudication. The 107,811 additional claims reflects a 52.5 percent increase in the inventory of appealed claims since Shinseki’s announcement. The American Legion has held significant concerns regarding VA’s sole focus on original claims in an effort to eliminate the backlog of claims meanwhile allowing the inventory of appealed claims to explode in recent years.

Due to these facts, we will be reviewing recently adjudicated appealed claims. Through these examinations, we are seeking to determine the adequacy of adjudications by VA personnel charged with adjudicated appealed claims, and we seek to discover a method to improve the process of reducing the backlog of appeals that is not detrimental to claimants.

VA has divided the nation into five areas; each VARO is assigned to one of the following areas:
- North Atlantic
- Midwest
- Continental
- Pacific
- Southeast

American Legion personnel will continue to monitor closely the quality of adjudications within each VARO and will work closely with DSO and VA employees to discover “best practices” to ensure that our nation’s veterans receive the service they deserve. Upon conclusion of each VARO visitation, a report will be compiled detailing our findings and forwarded to senior VA leadership, Congress, and leaders within The American Legion.

The American Legion has conducted visits in the following VAROs in 2016:
- Buffalo, NY
- St. Petersburg, FL
- Cleveland, OH
- Roanoke, VA
- Boston, MA
- Portland, OR
- St. Paul, MN

The following locations have been selected for the remainder of 2016, pending VA approval of the visitation:
- Houston, TX
- Columbia, SC
- San Diego, CA

Map to Success
To ensure that The American Legion maximizes its resources, the following timeline has been created to provide detail on how National Headquarters personnel will proceed with VARO visits. Effective reviews of VARO operations include reviewing individual veterans’ records. Consequentially, only American Legion accredited representatives will be permitted to conduct the reviews of adjudications; however, volunteers are permitted to become involved with entrance and exit interviews with VARO senior leadership.

VARO Preparation
The scheduling of the visits will begin 60-90 days prior to departure. National Headquarters staff will notify VA of the scheduled visit. VA notification will be conducted through their Benefits Assistance Service Office; VA staff will contact VARO personnel regarding the impending visit. Additionally, The American Legion will request that 25-30 recently adjudicated appealed claims to be available for review 30 days prior to the visit; another 25-30 recently adjudicated appealed claims will be made available for our review upon arrival at the VARO.

One month prior to departure, National Headquarters staff will notify American Legion department personnel. The Department Commander, Department Adjutant, and Department Service Officer (DSO) will be notified of the visit and invited to attend the initial and exit interviews with VARO leadership.

Visitation of VARO
Upon arrival at the selected VARO, American Legion personnel will meet with senior VARO personnel and discuss the purpose of the visit. Senior VARO personnel are encouraged to discuss changes in policy and the challenges they face with American Legion personnel; non-accredited American Legion personnel are invited to attend the meeting. The initial meeting should last approximately 1-2 hours. Following the meeting, American Legion and NVLSP personnel will meet with VA’s claims subject matter experts to discuss the previously reviewed claims.

On the first day, American Legion personnel will receive a review, briefing, and tour of the mail facility at the selected VARO. A common complaint regarding VARO operations is the processing of mail at VAROs. To ensure that veterans are receive the highest level of service, it is essential to verify that correspondence between veterans and VA is occurring in a timely manner.

American Legion and NVLSP personnel will review 25-30 claims VA selected for review during the second day of the visit. Additionally, one American Legion representative will meet with the DSO and VARO service center personnel to discuss concerns within the VARO. The interview with service center personnel can be conducted with a union representative present; any information divulged will be kept anonymous to encourage forthright answers from VA personnel.

During the morning of the final day of the VARO visit, American Legion and NVLSP personnel will conclude the claims review. Throughout the process, VA, Legion, and NVLSP personnel will discuss individual cases, if necessary, VA has the opportunity to rescind its previous decision. Any changes made by VA will be reflected in the post-visit report. American Legion personnel will meet senior VARO leadership for the exit interview. As with the initial interview upon arrival, non-accredited American Legion personnel are invited to attend. Discussions regarding immediate findings and concerns will be addressed, and preliminary suggestions may also be offered.
Immediately following the visit, American Legion National Headquarters staff will combine the findings between their preliminary case review in Washington, D.C., and at the VARO and determine if trends exist regarding the adjudication of claims. Any alterations to adjudications will be noted.

Department Service Officers School

In 1985, The American Legion has authorized the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Commission to conduct Department Service Officer (DSO) schools bi-annually for accredited representatives of The American Legion. It represents the organization’s ongoing commitment to developing a network of highly trained and experienced service officers responsible for effectively advocating for veterans and their families.

Department Officer School sessions provide current information about changes in veterans’ law and VA adjudication policies. Through these efforts, American Legion service officers improve their advocacy skills. The program of instruction includes basic training for new service officers, and advanced training on issues relating to claims processing, disability ratings, personal hearings, development of appeals, and the interpretation and application of precedent decisions by the U.S Court of Appeals for Veterans’ Claims and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

Individual department participation remains high; over 200 accredited representatives attended the trainings in 2016. During this reporting period, DSO School was held from February 17-19, 2016 Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C. and July 28-30, 2016 Columbia Club, Indianapolis, IN

Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service

Enhance applications to acknowledge and document regularly scheduled/occasional volunteers services, donations and volunteer hours at Vet Centers. To increase efficiency in tracking volunteer services and resources provided by volunteers at Vet Centers. To provide acknowledgment and appreciation to those volunteers, veterans service organizations and community partners who donate these resources to local VA Vet Centers. The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of— Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems.

Vet Centers are community based and part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. While the majority of these veteran patients are Vietnam era veterans, an increasing number of Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation New Dawn and recently discharged veterans are receiving care and treatment at Vet Centers. Currently, Vet Centers offer a wide range of services to veterans and their families at 300 community-based Vet Center locations nationwide.

The goal of the Vet Center program is to provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to eligible veterans in order to help them make a satisfying post-war readjustment to civilian life. While the Vet Centers benefit from volunteers, the volunteers’ hours are inaccurately reported through the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Program. Whether it be greeting veterans when they arrive, providing and serving provisions, or charitable donations, volunteers provide a variety of beneficial services to the Vet Centers. If unable to accurately track the hours provided by volunteers, local VAVS committees have no way of providing proper recognition to Vet Center volunteers and cannot promote the important work they do.

Team Leaders at Vet Centers and VAVS Chiefs or Program Managers need to ensure that Vet Center volunteers are registered through the system in order to accurately capture all volunteer hours. The Voluntary Service System (VSS) is the data base that documents volunteer hours of service, areas of service, affiliations, donations and contact information. Currently, there is no service code for Vet Center volunteers in the VSS.
The National Advisory Committee (NAC) membership recommends that the Department of Veterans Affairs, through the Director of the Voluntary Service Office, take actions to: develop and implement procedures to ensure that the volunteer hours and donations provided to Vet Centers are accurately documented. Acknowledge and recognize these dedicated volunteers and community partners who serve at Vet Centers nationwide. The NAC membership also recommends that the VA expand the Voluntary Service System to include a service code for Vet Center volunteers.

The NAC also recommends the expansion of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) NAC categories of membership to include Post-9/11 Veterans’ Groups and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) whose Mission Statement and/or Charter include provisions to serve veterans. Exempt current Certified VAVS NAC organizations from Public-Private Partnership regulation as identified in VA Directive 0008 and VHA Directive 1098.

To increase involvement and strategic partnerships with newer Post-9/11 Veterans’ Groups/NGO similar to Team Rubicon; Team Red, White, and Blue; and The Mission Continues. To reaffirm VA’s 70+ year affiliation with VSO’s and NGO’s who serve on the VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee.

The National Advisory Committee has five categories of membership: Service, Associate Service, Donor, Associate Donor, and Adjunct Membership. Membership must maintain the provision of volunteers and participation on local VAVS facility committees at a minimum of 15 VA facilities. Newer veterans’ groups may not yet meet the minimum representation, they can advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the coordination and promotion of volunteer activities within VA health care facilities, and on other matters relating to volunteerism as per the VAVS NAC’s scope of activities.

Team Rubicon combines the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders and emergency workers to rapidly deploy well-trained disaster relief teams worldwide. Team Red White and Blue’s mission is to enrich the lives of America’s veterans by connecting them to their communities through physical and social activity and local volunteerism. The Mission Continues empowers veterans in readjustment transitions by deploying them in platoons to fulfill community service projects. The VAVS program would greatly benefit from an increased partnership with these and other post 9/11 veterans organizations to gather input on how the VA can better serve current and future generations of veterans. The VAVS NAC has an extensive history of support for veterans cared for by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Coordinating and enhancing public-private partnerships with the Office of Community Engagement is an opportunity to expand and improve services provided by VAVS NAC, OCE and NGO’s.

The NAC membership recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs fully support active coordination with Post-9/11 veterans’ groups including, but not limited to Team Rubicon, Team Red, White and Blue, and The Mission Continues. The NAC membership further recommends that the VA take action to authorize additional Non-Governmental Organizations and representatives from the Office of Community Engagement as part of the VAVS National Advisory Committee.

The NAC membership also recommends that the Secretary, through the VAVS Director, explore the expansion of the VAVS National Advisory Committee’s membership categories, beginning with the Associate Service Member category to include such groups.

Veteran Affairs & Rehabilitation Health Policy Unit

The Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Health Policy Unit national staff includes: Roscoe Butler, Deputy Director for Health Care, Team Leader for Health Policy (Vacant); Derrick Redd, Assistant Director for Health Care; April Commander, Assistant Director for Health Care; John L. Santos, Assistant Director for Health Care; Wanda Kennedy, Administrative Assistant; and one vacancy for the Assistant Director for TBI/PTSD Programs.
System Worth Saving

The American Legion’s primary healthcare evaluation tool is the “System Worth Saving” program. The program was designed in 2003 by American Legion Past National Commander Ron Conley.

The selected SWS site visits for fiscal year 2016 were submitted and approved during the previous Fall NEC meeting. Thus far, the Health Policy staff and VA&R Commission members have participated in seven SWS site visits as follows: St. Cloud VA Health Care System, St. Cloud, MN (Dec); West Texas VA Health Care System, Big Spring, TX (Jan); Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System-West Campus, Montgomery, AL (Feb); VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System, Reno, NV (Mar); Grand Junction Health Care System, Grand Junction, CO (Apr); VA Salt Lake City Health Care System, Salt Lake City, UT (May); and VA Southern Nevada Health Care System, Las Vegas, NV (May).

The remaining scheduled site visits are: Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center, Walla Walla, WA (Jul); VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (University Drive Campus), Pittsburgh, PA (added for Aug); Overton Brooks VA Medical Center, Shreveport, LA (Sep); Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital, Hines, IL (added for Sep); VA Maine Healthcare System, Augusta, ME (Oct); and VA Western New York Healthcare System, Batavia, NY (Nov).

Executive Summary | A System Worth Saving: 2016

Background and History

For the past two years The Department of Veterans Affairs has been under fire by the VA Inspector General, Congress and our nation’s veterans for the outpatient wait time scandal and poor management oversight. This has led to many calling for an overhaul in the VA health care system, while some have called for privatizing the system all together.

The American Legion continues to hold true to its original mission, which was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness. This mission has not changed since 1919 and The American Legion remains committed to ensuring the VA health care system remains intact and properly funded “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan” (Abraham Lincoln).

The American Legion has two programs that monitor VA benefits including the System Worth Saving (SWS) program and the Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) program. Teams from the SWS program travel across the country and conduct site visits at VA Medical Centers. The purpose of these site visits is to identify problems, challenges, best practices, and to provide recommendations for improvements. Prior to each SWS site visit, the team hosts a town hall meeting to hear firsthand from local veterans about their VA health care experience.

Like the SWS program, The American Legion visits VA Regional Offices (VAROs) to review the quality of VA claims adjudications, interview VA employees, and to discuss concerns with local American Legion claims representatives. The primary mission of the Regional Office Action Review is to improve the accuracy and delivery of disability compensation benefits to veterans. The American Legion dispatches a team of accredited representatives and seasoned attorneys to the VAROs to review a percentage of randomly selected claims’ adjudications and the overall development of VA claims at that facility.

The SWS and ROAR programs have evolved to become two of The American Legion’s premier mechanisms to improve the veteran’s access to compensation benefits and quality health care. At the 2015 Fall National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting, the NEC approved 12 SWS site visits and 12 ROAR visits. In 2016, the SWS team received requests from the Department of MN for a special purpose visit to the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, the Department of Illinois, and the Department of Alabama, which added three more SWS site visits to the list. So far the SWS team has conducted nine site visits (St. Cloud, MN; Big Spring, TX; Montgomery, AL; Reno, NV; Grand Junction, CO; Salt...
Lake City, UT; Las Vegas, NV; Walla Walla, WA and Pittsburgh, PA) with an additional four remaining.

The ROAR team has visited seven VA Regional Offices, to include Buffalo, NY; St. Petersburg, FL; Cleveland, OH; Roanoke, VA; Boston, MA; Portland, OR; and St. Paul, MN with an additional five remaining.

VA medical centers that are investigated by the VA Office of the Inspector General and those scrutinized by mainstream media or identified as having issues by Legionnaires are recommended for inclusion in the SWS schedule. Additionally, a request that is received from our departments can constitute a Special Purpose SWS site visit. After a decision is made to visit a VA health care facility, the executive leadership of the medical center is notified of the requested visit. The department adjutant and local post are briefed on the visit schedule and encouraged to participate. In addition, congressional members or their representatives are invited and encouraged to attend the town hall meeting, along with local leaders and local VA executive staff.

On the first day of the site visit, a town hall meeting is held to hear from local veterans about their health care concerns. Over the past year the VA Choice program has consistently been the number one concern at each town hall meetings. During the Walla Walla, WA town hall meeting a Marine Corps veteran stated “VA employees at the local call center said it is hard to help veterans with issues they are having – especially with the Choice Program.” This veteran also shared his concerns regarding access to care stating, “Years ago we had a 24-hour clinic. If you were sick, you were able to get care right away. Now, we don’t want to go to the local hospital because it comes out of our pockets.”

During the medical facility site visits, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Commission members and National staff interview and receive executive level briefings from VA staff in the following areas: Human Resources, Business Office, Enrollment, Non-VA Care, Choice Program, Outreach, all Clinical Services, Homeless Program, Patient Advocate, Construction, Budget, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), their Women’s, and their Homeless Veterans Program. For each of the programs listed, The American Legion wants to better understand what progress has been made over the previous three years, the current situation, and the facilities strategic five-year plan and goals.

SWS Site Visit Challenges
1. St. Cloud VA Health Care System (SCVAHCS) St. Cloud, MN

During the SCVAHCS site visits, the following was identified as their top challenges:

- Aging infrastructure/construction/space: While their almost 90-year old buildings have been well maintained, many internal structures require significant renovation or replacement. Clinics are crowded and not designed to support the current care delivery models. Multiple construction projects cause the need for swing space during periods of construction. Project delays and cost limits delay the opening of much needed space. While there is a long term plan, SCVAHCS has short term needs that are increasingly difficult to meet.

- Growth/access to care: SCVAHCS has experienced a 155 percent increase in unique patients, growing from 12,111 patients in FY00 to 38,603 in FY15. Despite declining a veteran population in the SCVAHCS service area, more veterans continue to seek care. SCVAHCS has experienced patient growth every year since FY00, except for FY13, when they experienced a slight decline in the number of unique patients. This was due to the opening of the Northwest Metro VA Clinic in Ramsey, MN (aligned under the Minneapolis VAHCS) which resulted in several thousand patients shifting care away from St. Cloud. FY14 and FY15 saw unique patient growth resume. Growth in enrollment is certainly positive, but the increased demand for services has put a strain on their capacity. Many clinics and the facility uses Choice and traditional Non-VA Care Coordination (NVCC) to assist with meeting the demand. SCVAHCS continues to recruit for providers in Primary Care, Mental Health and Specialty Care (surgical and medical, all sub-specialties) to meet the increased demand and have
had difficulty keeping up. Provider recruitment has been a focus area and will continue to be for years to come.

- **Succession Planning:** The SCVAHCS faces significant succession challenges along with tremendous competition for skilled health care providers and staff. With 12.7% of the total workforce and 17.2% of supervisors projected to be eligible for retirement by 2018, the healthcare system is charged with developing creative and innovative methods of staff development. Less experienced staff may struggle to fill the knowledge vacuum that is created when experienced managers retire. The facility needs to prepare new clinical leaders now in order to ensure smooth transitions.

- **Work Environment:** The FY14 All Employee Survey demonstrated that SCVAHCS has a challenge with employee satisfaction and workplace perceptions in various departments throughout the healthcare system. It is the facility’s goal to become a safe and productive workplace with satisfied employees who would recommend SCVAHCS as an exceptional place to work. It is incumbent upon facility leadership to enable this shift towards an excellent work environment. The FY15 survey demonstrated improvement in employee satisfaction and many other metrics across the healthcare system. St. Cloud has made progress but still has work to do.

- **Affordable Care Act:** The Affordable Care Act provides veterans with new options for health care that will compete with VA services. SCVAHCS needs to proactively address veterans’ concerns and communicate the benefits associated with VA services in order to prevent a loss of veterans to alternate options for health care.

- **Veterans Choice Act:** The Veterans Choice Act enables veterans who live greater than 40 miles from the nearest VA facility or appointment dates greater than 30 days are eligible to receive care in the community. SCVAHCS will have to communicate broadly and clearly to ensure veterans understand their rights and eligibility. They will also have to monitor their internal processes and work closely with their community partners to ensure a smooth transition in and continuation of the new practice.

- **Agency Restructuring:** The VA is currently undergoing a phase of restructuring. It is difficult to foresee how the VA will look at the end results of all the changes. This uncertainty is challenging to employees and veterans.

**Recommendations**

- The American Legion recommends that the Executive Leadership host a meeting with all clinical providers to allow opportunity to voice their concerns about the work environment at the SCVAHCS, and develop a plan of action

- The American Legion recommends VA Central Office reconsider the hard capped funding limitation placed on SCVAHCS Non-VA Community Care program, which was capped at $41 million. The funding limitation was $7 million below the health care system’s budget projections and due to not having acute medical hospital inpatient beds, the health care system, on average, has 30 veterans hospitalized in community hospitals daily. The health care system is being penalized for a situation they have no control over and should be funded at the level they anticipate it will cost to provide non-VA community care, excluding the VA Choice program.

- The SCVAHCS C&P action plan calls for their backlog to be eliminated within 6 to 9 months. The American Legion requested the Director provide The American Legion with a status update on whether the C&P program is back in line with the national average processing time.

2. West Texas VA Health Care System (Big Spring, TX)
• Access. The rurality of the West Texas VA Health Care System poses unique challenges in providing the most appropriate health care to veterans in the right location in a timely manner.
• The WTVAHCS closed its inpatient acute medical bed program, which changed its designation from acute care to an ambulatory care setting. During the town hall meeting, a veteran voiced concerns about having to be referred outside the medical center for acute inpatient hospitalization and indicated he preferred getting his health care at the WTVAHCS.
• High Turn-Over in key leadership positons – The WTVAHCS System is a Level 3 health-care facility (Level 1a facilities are the most complex facilities, whereas Level 3 facilities are the least complex). The complexity level assignment is reviewed every three years. VA uses three sets of variables in the decision making for determination of complexity level:
  - Patient population – volume of patients, complexity of care
  - Clinical services complexity – intensive care unit level, surgical (OR) complexity level, number of complex clinical programs
  - Education and Research – total number of resident slots and affiliated teaching programs (physician residency programs), research dollars
• During the visit, the SWS team identified the following contributing factors that related to vacancies and turnover: the high cost of living in the “oil patch”, the rural environment, compensation levels for professional staff, and the impact of turnover and vacancies at the senior management level.

Recommendations
• The American Legion recommends addressing the vacancy issue by reevaluating compensation, tenure commitment, and as a last resort, the use of contract services.
• The American Legion recommends addressing the turnover issues by instituting performance related compensation, senior level tenure stability, professional development (including off-site training and conferences), maintaining a culture of professionalism with “high-touch”, exit interviewing by senior management and involvement of VISN-level executives.

3. Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) Montgomery, AL
• Recruitment & Retention: According to the facility’s Human Resources staff, CAVHCS currently has 700 vacancies; approximately 30% are care providers.
• Veterans Choice Act: The Veterans Choice Act enables veterans who live greater than 40 miles from the nearest VA facility or appointment dates greater than 30 days to receive care in the community. CAVHCS struggles with Choice due to the rural location of the medical center and lack of providers willing to accept the Choice Program rates.

When asked about what they are doing to ensure that there is open communication among the medical center, veterans and the community at large, the executive leadership responded with the following:
• CAVHCS has a Veterans Voice Advisory Committee (which includes members of The American Legion’s Departments of Alabama and Georgia) which consists of veterans from across the region who report and make recommendations within the governance structure to the medical governing body to help spark healthcare improvements and solve problems. According to the committee’s minutes from the latest meeting in December 2015, issues mentioned included: Choice and VA referral overlap, employees were not aware as to whom the leadership is at CAVHCS. and scheduling conflicts at the podiatry clinic.
CAVHCS leadership attended the meeting and quickly began to work on resolving the aforementioned issues. In order to ensure CAVHCS and veterans continue to have efficient communication and better education on the VA system as a whole, The American Legion recommended that the director hold an orientation with veterans once a month and provide assistance to the medical center in educating the veterans in the facility’s catchment area. The American Legion also requested that the medical center hold a town hall meeting with leadership from Health Net in order to clarify any concerns with the Choice Program.

Recommendations
- Develop a strategic and ongoing relationship with the local universities and colleges in and around Montgomery. The east campus of CAVHCS, Tuskegee, is only 40 miles from the west campus and has affiliations with the Morehouse School of Medicine, Alabama State University, Auburn University, and Tuskegee University. These affiliations should not only be affiliated with one campus.
- The American Legion recommends using the Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP) that authorizes VA to provide student loan reduction payments to employees with qualifying loans who are in health care positions providing direct patient care services and are in positions that are considered hard to recruit or retain. The loan must be for the health professional’s education that qualified the applicant for a specific position. Each Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facility determines which positions are hard to recruit and retain and when the facility will offer EDRP for these positions. EDRP is a recruitment and retention incentive only offered or approved for certain positions, but should be promoted and highlighted by CAVHCS when trying to attract new recruits.
- In an attempt to help alleviate frustration and expense The American Legion is working with both Congress and the VA to develop a new Veterans Choice Program that would replace all of the Non-VA Care programs currently offered by VA, to include the existing Choice Program. The data collected at various SWS site visits will be factored in when considering how to develop The American Legion’s position on the new Veterans Choice Program.

4. VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) Reno, NV
- Centralization of HR: When asked if centralization of HR would have a positive or negative affect on the hiring and recruitment process, the SWS team was advised that it would be a disaster. Concerns were voiced that centralization would take away local control and oversight from the medical center’s director. VASNHCS shared the following examples where nationwide centralization has not been successful to include prosthetics and procurement services.
- Catchment area is large and rural: The catchment area for the VASNHCS is the 2nd largest rural district in the country. It is comprised of 110,000 square miles of territory in northern Nevada and California. Veteran populations are scattered across a multitude of small rural towns in 20 counties.

Recommendations
- Signage – The VASNHCS Executive Leadership should update their directional signage throughout the medical center that is easily understood, and veterans and visitor will leave the medical center with a positive VA experience.
• Medical Record Documentation for Non-VA Care, and since VA at a national level has decoupled the medical record documentation from the payment process, VA must ensure the time requirements specified in the national contract are met. When the requirements are not met, VA must exercise its contractual option to hold the contractor accountable.

• Beneficiary Travel – To prevent veterans from having to pay for beneficiary travel related expenses when referred as an inpatient from one VAMC to another VAMC, The American Legion recommends that The American Legion Department of Nevada work with the VASNHCS in drafting a legislative resolution to:
  o Authorize VA to pay a veterans’ beneficiary travel expenses when transferred from one VAMC to another VAMC as an inpatient, if
    1) Upon completion of the medical care, the veteran is discharged to home as an outpatient, and
    2) The veteran is not otherwise eligible, thus financially unable to pay the cost of travel to return home.

5. Grand Junction Veterans Health Care System (GJVHCS) Grand Junction, CO

• Choice Program: When Choice was rolled out, there was no centralized training offered to the local VA medical centers. In some instances, it has taken Health Net six months or more to reimburse providers. Scheduling Choice appointments has also been an issue; the medical center is left completely out of the loop with veterans eligible for Choice via the 40 mile rule. This has resulted in a break in continuum of care.

• Women Veterans Healthcare: Without a private clinic, women veterans enjoy little to no privacy when seeking care at GJVHCS. It was also reported that mammography results have not been received when the appointment was completed through Choice.

Recommendations

• The medical center should hold workshops to educate our veterans on how to use the Choice Program.

• All letters, especially appointment letters should include an employee I.D. number on them so they could be traced back to the person that sent the letter.

• People making the phone calls should be assigned to small groups of veterans, such as veterans with the last name beginning with letter A to C assigned to employee I.D. #1234 or Mr. Smith. All calls should be recorded or put on a call log in system that will record the employee ID number, date and time of calls, so that they cannot claim a call was made when it wasn’t. Returning calls within 7 days is one of the many standards for Patient Advocates in VA that should be met without fail. With the aforementioned system in place, this standard is possible.

• Create a magnet that veterans could put on their refrigerator to remind the veterans to call in within 72 hours if they are seen at another VA or ER, and to contact their provider if they stop taking or no longer need their medication. Veterans need more education on the protocol of Non-VA emergency care.

• The American Legion recommends that the facility include a Women Veteran’s Clinic in their new construction plan.

• MyHealtheVet - MyHealtheVet is VA’s online personal health record. It was designed for veterans, active duty servicemembers, their dependents and caregivers. My HealtheVet helps veterans partner with their health care team and provides veterans opportunities and tools to make informed decisions and manage their health care. Additional outreach should be
conducted regarding the benefits of MyHealtheVet to the veterans in the catchment area of GJVHCS.

- Satisfaction Cards – Rather than relying solely on Surveys of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP), GJVHCS should hand out brief satisfaction cards to patients in order to gauge a more accurate veteran’s experience while receiving care.

6. George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Salt Lake City, UT

- Budget allocation: Only allows for emergency purchases. This inhibits the medical center’s ability to have the best equipment available to meet the needs of veterans.
- Competitive salaries: The medical center is unable to attract and retain staff due to generous salaries offered in the civilian sector. Another reason impacting recruiting staff includes long on-boarding time frame for new hires. New hires have accepted civilian sector jobs as they can begin working much sooner for greater pay.

Recommendations

- Advancement in modern medicine is a daily occurrence. While The American Legion understands from time to time, VA must impose budget constraints, we also believe that restricting equipment purchases to only emergency purchases limits VA medical centers from ensuring they have the best equipment available. The American Legion recommends the Executive Leadership continue to work with local and national guidelines to ensure they continue to provide the best health care to our nation’s veterans, which includes having state of the art 21st century equipment. Executive leadership should ensure that when they are meeting with Veteran Service Organizations, these issues are discussed. The American Legion can address these concerns at the local as well as at the national level, but only if made aware of such issues.
- The American Legion has repeatedly testified before Congress in support of competitive salaries. Leadership should continue to utilize all options available to them set forth in current law. The American Legion will continue to advocate for competitive salaries to ensure VA remains competitive with community health care facilities and is able to attract highly qualified health care professionals.

7. VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, Las Vegas, NV

- Choice/Triwest: The medical center is informed by Triwest that veterans cannot be contacted or Triwest has scheduled veterans for the wrong service. For example, a veteran who needed an ophthalmology appointment was given an optometry appointment instead, which delayed the needed appointment. A veteran needed an ophthalmology appointment, but was given an optometry appointment which delays the needed appointment.
- On-boarding processing: Potential new hires who truly want to serve veterans are forced to find other employment since the on-boarding process with the VA is extremely long, especially for physicians.

Recommendations

- Executive leadership should continue to work with TRIWEST to ensure veterans appointments are scheduled in a timely manner within the community.
- Executive leadership should continue to work with Human Resources to 1., active engagement of the incumbents to keep them abreast of hiring process
to prevent offer rejection and 2. maintain a robust recruitment and retention plan to continue to attract possible incumbents.

8. Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center, Walla Walla, WA
   • During the SWS visit to Walla Walla, VAMC Director Brian Westfield addressed concerns unique to the rural facility’s medical center and outlined current plans to enhance the campus and the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). “We are a completely different facility compared to how we were. We are much more engaged in community care,” he said. Director Westfield continued:
     • Out of the nearly 63,000 military veterans residing in the area, only approximately 20,000 former service members are enrolled in the system and using the VAMC for their primary care needs.” The director also placed emphasis on programs and agreements in place that benefit under-served veterans in surrounding communities, including Native American veterans, homeless veterans, and veterans seeking care for substance abuse.
     • VA leaders discussed the intricate challenges facing the system, including budget constraints, issues with the Choice program, and difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. Westfield identified the “ever-changing roster of medical professionals” as its main issue for veterans receiving care. “These patients often slip through bureaucratic cracks while waiting for a new provider,” Director Westfield said. “Rural areas seem to have more difficulty hiring qualified physicians compared to their counterparts in other geographic locations.”
     • Recruiting and retention of providers and other clinical staff: Many factors impact recruiting and retention including rural location, non-competitive salaries, VA’s image, the mandatory use of USAJobs, and long onboarding process. These challenges lead to short staffing which has a negative impact on timely access to care.
     • Overcoming VA Bad Press: The VA could use more good publicity nationally about the services they provide, especially related to traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other veteran specific care. The VA understands the unique needs of veterans they serve and provides quality healthcare services to generally satisfied customers. The strengths of the VA rarely makes the news.

Recommendations
   • Executive leadership should continue to work with staff to maintain an active outreach and awareness program to continue to attract veterans for enrollment into the VA health care system.
   • Approve salary flexibility and hiring incentives to attract applicants and retain hires. Do whatever it takes without a salary cap.
   • Community leaders and stakeholders must be proactive and tell the “good news and success stories” to balance the negative stories that that get repeated over and over by the media.

9. VA Pittsburgh Health Care System, Pittsburgh, PA
   • Space: The medical center has a shuttle to provide services to ease crowding of the parking structure, but leadership proposed that VA employees be shuttled from the offsite parking area and let the veteran’s access the onsite parking areas.
   • Nursing: Over the past 3-4 years, the nursing benefits package has lost some of its appeal, as the private sector has caught up with and surpassed the VA pay rates.
• Physicians pay: While the primary care physicians pay is competitive, there is a difference of 40-50% less with the orthopedic physicians pay compared to their civilian counterparts.
• Clinic space: Several of the providers voiced that they would like to see the primary care clinic moved outside of the main facility and let VA Pittsburgh be for the specialties.

Recommendations
• Leadership should continue to identify their spacing needs through the Strategic Capital Investment Program (SCIP) and leverage their relationships with their local Veteran Service Organizations to champion their cause.
• To address the nursing benefit packages and the physicians pay, leadership and human resources should research other avenues to ensure that the salaries and benefit packages remain competitive with the private sector.

Regional Office Action Review
How Visits Are Conducted
VAROs were visited based largely upon the appeals inventory. The American Legion interest focused on what efforts were being made by VARO to reduce the inventory while improving accuracy. Additionally, St. Paul VARO was selected largely due to their success in adjudicating claims and to determine if their adjudication process could be replicated among other VAROs.

The American Legion contacts Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO) to alert them that a visit is being requested. The contact occurs no less than 30 days prior to the visits and the visit may last three days. The American Legion National Headquarters staff contacts the department adjutants and department service officers to encourage their participation following VA’s approval of the visit.

An initial meeting is conducted with senior VARO personnel upon arrival. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the purpose of the visit, address any concerns the VARO may have, and allow VARO personnel to identify issues they face in adjudicating claims. American Legion accredited representatives review recently adjudicated appeals following the meeting, meet with VARO line employees and discuss our initial findings with local subject matter experts to determine if VA will correct any noted errors. The final day of the visitation culminates with a final meeting with senior VARO personnel to discuss errors, comments by VA employees, and possible solutions to rectify errors.

The American Legion focused on appeals during the past 12 months. We reviewed the quality of adjudications rendered by members of the appeals team in the above VAROs. Through July 2016, American Legion accredited representatives reviewed 180 claims of which 88 claims (48.89%) were either inadequately developed and prematurely denied or were erroneously rated. The most prevalent comments regarding adjudications include:
• Inadequate compensation and pension examinations,
• Under evaluation of medical condition,
• VA failed to comply with its duty to assist,
• Inferred claim, and
• Invitation to file for total disability based on individual unemployability (TDIU)

VA defines an error as a decision rendered that negatively impacted the amount of benefit awarded the veteran. Due to the complexity of VA claims, The American Legion insists that failure to develop claims adequately is also an error. VA has a duty to assist veterans. If they fail to meet that objective, veterans claims may be erroneously decided. As a result, The American Legion’s accuracy ratings of VA’s decisions is significantly lower than VA’s published accuracy ratings.
Outcomes of Visits

Only the Cleveland VARO has responded to our comments. The collaboration of the Cleveland VARO and The American Legion resulted in the ability to secure over $110,000 in retroactive benefits and increased ratings for veterans. In one instance, a veteran received over $95,000 in retroactive benefits and had TDIU granted which significantly increasing his monthly benefit.

The visitations have also proven to be an invaluable tool for training American Legion accredited representatives. Findings from the visitations allow American Legion National Headquarters to recognize trends in VA adjudicating. These identified trends are discussed during our bi-annual Department Service Officer School to provide the necessary tools and methods to American Legion accredited representatives to improve their advocacy skills.

VARO Employees and American Legion Concerns

Significant concern among VA employees and American Legion accredited representatives exist regarding the National Work Queue (NWQ). NWQ was designed to efficiently adjudicate veterans’ claims by having them dispersed throughout the nation. Both VA employees and American Legion representatives have voiced their concerns; however, little response to those concerns have been received by either VA employees or Legion representatives. Some VAROs were assured by VACO that since their office had an excess of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees, the majority of their cases would be adjudicated within the VARO. This statement has been proven to be untrue. St. Paul VARO has an excess of FTEs. Recent reports indicate that less than half of the claims of veterans residing in the St. Paul VARO’s area of jurisdiction are having their claims adjudicated in that office.

VA created and implemented an evaluation builder to assist VA adjudicators to assign appropriate disability ratings. The tool was to serve as a guide to the employees for their use, as it only considers certain aspects of the adjudication process. VA raters and decision review officers indicated that if they elected not to use the suggested rating by the evaluation builder, then a local quality review team is notified. A discussion with the local quality review team will ensue as to why they elected to not use the suggested rating. Many employees stated to avoid the conversations they have simply started using the suggested rating. Since VA raters and decision review officers are only using the evaluation builder, subtle evidence gleaned from lay statements and treatment records is not taken into consideration. Veterans may be assigned lower ratings due to subtle evidence being disregarded.

Senior VA personnel at the VAROs have stated that no employee is required to use the tool. However, when The American Legion reported what was occurring, they assured Legion personnel the issue would be addressed.

Another area of concern is a sense that judges at the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) have a greater authority than VARO personnel. This attitude permeates the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) regardless of pay grade. The etiology of this belief is unclear; however, nowhere within statute, regulation, or case law does it state VBA’s authority is subservient to BVA. Many veterans are forced to appeal their claim. The appeals inventory is exploding.

Employees and American Legion accredited representatives are increasingly frustrated by VA’s electronic program for storing and adjudicating claims, the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Improper labeling of documents, significant lag time during use and a reduction of communication between VA and American Legion accredited representatives located within the VAROs have resulted in claims being promulgated prior to a review by the accredited representatives. During The American Legion’s Department Service Officer School in July 2016, over 50 accredited representatives located in VAROs were queried regarding whether they are allotted the full 48 hours to review all adjudicated claims. Not one representative stated they are always granted the full 48 hours. VA’s failure to allow the full 48 hours to review the adjudicated claims ultimately reduces the level of advocacy for veterans nationwide.
Privatization

One veteran recently commented at Legion.org that privatization equals “profitization.” Our veterans are not mercenaries who fought for a privately owned army. They served in the U.S. military. The federal government has a solemn obligation to care for them. Stated another way, the private sector didn’t send our heroes to war. Uncle Sam did. The private sector works quite well when producing automobiles, computers and other popular goods and services. But it is not the solution to making veterans whole again.

Economists from the Congressional Budget Office have repeatedly estimated that the costs of VA privatization proposals would inflate the federal budget to unsustainable proportions. The continuity of the research, teaching, and emergency preparedness VA provides would be lost if the nation’s largest health-care system were shuttered.

Conclusion

The American Legion stands ready to assist the VA in its transformation. The System Worth Saving and the Regional Office Action Review programs are two examples of how The American Legion can help. As for privatization, the veterans are the nation’s heroes and deserve nothing but the best health care that our nation has to offer. The American Legion believes the VA Healthcare System is most capable of treating veterans. VA is a place veterans call home. We all know that we heal the best at home.

TBI and PTSD Programs

Members of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) Commission TBI and PTSD Committee held one meeting between September 2015 – September 2016. On Saturday February 20, 2016, the TBI and PTSD Committee met during the Washington Conference from 12:00 – 5:00 pm at the Jefferson East Concourse Level, Washington Hilton.

The mission of the TBI and PTSD Committee is to ensure veterans with traumatic brain injuries or who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder receive the best care possible to assist with their transition back into their local communities. During the morning session, Dr. Jeanne Stellman provided an update on the 2015 TBI/PTSD Survey, and Dr. Robert Bossarte, Director, Epidemiology Program, Department of Veterans Affairs presented information on suicides. During the afternoon session, the committee heard from Laurel Rodewald from the Elizabeth Dole Caregivers Foundation who presented information on Caregivers. Margaret Kabat, National Director Caregiver support programs for the Department of Veteran Affairs then presented information on the Caregivers State of Affairs. Lastly, Dr. Suzanne Sisley wrapped up the meeting with a presentation on Barriers to Researching Medicinal Marijuana.

Dr. Sisley explain how legislating marijuana as a schedule I drug has helped to cast a negative image on the drug. It is her goal to have marijuana reclassified so that at a minimum it will recognized as a drug with potential medical value and will open the door to research potential which has been blocked by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The TBI/PTSD Committee discussed the pros and cons of drafting a resolution to support clinical research on the health benefits of Marijuana. PNC Detweiler indicated he would take this up with his department.

Accredited Representatives

In completing VA form 21-22 “Power of Attorney”, the claimant appoints The American Legion as accredited representative in a claim for benefits administered by the Department of Veteran Affairs. It is the duty of the organization to provide assistance, advice, and counsel veterans, survivors and dependents so as to ensure their rights are protected and they receive all benefits to which they may be entitled under the law. The American Legion, as a congressionally chartered organization since 1919, conducts this service program through the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. Accredited Representatives of The American Legion provide formal representation in
claims before VA Regional Offices or the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. Their respective Departments have recommended these representatives for accreditation because of their knowledge, experience, and expertise in the field of federal benefit programs, especially those provided through the Department of Veteran Affairs.

To become an accredited representative of The American Legion, a formal application must be submitted to the National VA&R Director with an accompanying endorsement signed by the Department Adjutant. The director, as the national certifying officer, will review and forward the request to VA’s Office of General Counsel (OGC) to finalize the request for accreditation. The form is never sent directly to OGC; accreditation will not be approved by VA until certified by the requesting organization. Upon approval of the application, the individual is recognized by VA as an accredited representative of The American Legion and will receive official notification of this action from VA. The accreditation will remain in effect until such time as the VA&R director receives a written request from the Department Commander or Department Adjutant to revoke the individual’s accreditation due to death, retirement, resignation, or on rare occasions for just causes. The director will then notify OGC the accreditation should be cancelled.

New accreditations and cancellations are reported monthly on VA’s general list of accredited representatives—VA information Bulletin IB 2-51. During the reporting period 559, requests for accreditation and 292 requests for cancellation were received from the Departments and submitted to VA for necessary action. As of June 30, 2016, there were 3,319 accredited representatives of The American Legion with 35 pending accreditation. Any questions concerning the proper procedure or regulations pertaining to accreditation of individuals or their representatives should be submitted to the director for the National VA&R Division in the Washington, D.C. office.

Staff Field Assignments

Staff from the National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, including the director, deputy directors, assistant directors, and representatives from the Health Policy Unit and Board of Veterans Appeals attended various American Legion functions around the country such as: the National Convention, Fall and Spring National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings, the Annual Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C., Department Conventions, Department Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) trainings, Department Seminars, Department Service Officer Schools, Department Claims training, fully developed claims assessment and training at seven VA Regional Offices, fact-finding trips, and various conferences.

Personnel and Organization

As of August 1, 2016, VA&R staffing is reported as follows:

Director ................................................................. 1
Administrative Assistants .............................................. 3
Deputy Director for Health Care .................................. 1
Team Lead for Health Policy ......................................... 0
Assistant Director for Health Care ................................. 2
Assistant Director for TBI/PTSD ................................. 0

Deputy Director for Claims ........................................... 1
Assistant Director for Claims ....................................... 1
Senior Team Leader, BVA ........................................... 1
Team Leader, BVA ................................................... 4
Assistant Directors for Appeals ..................................... 14
Administrative Assistants ............................................ 3
Deputy Director for MEB/PEB/DoD ............................... 1
Assistant Director for DoD Military Review Boards ........... 0
Medical Consultant................................................................................................................... 1
Total Personnel – Washington Office............................................................... 29

Satellite Offices

Insurance Field Office: Philadelphia, PA
Chief of Insurance Activities................................................................. 1
Pension Management Center: Philadelphia, PA ......................................... 1

Debt Management Center/PMC St. Paul, MN
Assistant Director ....................................................................................... 1
PMC Representative ................................................................................... 1
Assistant Director (Restricted Claims) ....................................................... 1

Pension Management Center Milwaukee ................................................... 1
Benefits Delivery at Discharge Winston Salem................................. 1
Benefits Delivery at Discharge Salt Lake City ........................................... 1
IDES Representative Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington ................. 1

VA&R Total ............................................................................................. 38

Certificates of Appreciation
Under authority of May 1958 NEC Resolution, The American Legion has continued
to award a Certificate of Appreciation to officials of the Department of Veteran Affairs,
upon their retirement or resignation, For Services Rendered and Cooperation Extended in
Connection with The American Legion’s Rehabilitation Program. Under criteria
established in line with the enabling resolution, nominations for the award are submitted
by Department or National officials of The American Legion twice a year. The
nominations are considered by a committee of the National Veterans Affairs and
Rehabilitation Commission, at meetings preceding the National Veterans Affairs and
Rehabilitation Conference and the National Convention. The Committee recommends to
the Commission the names of those considered deserving of the Certificate.

Six Certificates of Appreciation were awarded during the period July 1, 2015 through
June 30, 2016, for an overall total of 1,336 since the program was initiated.

Citation for Meritorious Service
The Citation, authorized by the National Executive Committee in May 1956, seeks to
recognize the long and faithful service of Post Service Officers and others. Nominations
for the Citation are submitted by Department officials to the National Veterans Affairs and
Rehabilitation Director at any time. The acting for the Chairman and members of the
Commission issues the award.

Thirty-four Citations for Meritorious Service and loyal cooperation in The American
Legion’s Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation program were presented during the period
July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. Since this type of recognition and appreciation began, 5,127
citations for meritorious service have been presented.

American Legion Auxiliary (ALA)
Diane Duscheck, National Chairman

Service Not Self is more than a slogan to American Legion Auxiliary members who
are actively engaged in Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation activities. Our mission to support
caregivers has proved beneficial for both veterans and their caregivers. Unit members
traveled many miles to provide or prepare meals, clean homes, do yard work, help with laundry, run errands, and drive veterans to appointments. Even family pets received special care when we offered pet-sitting services to veterans who were away from their homes.

To support the ALA mission and to enhance the lives of military abroad and veterans at home, Georgia's Cummings Unit 307 stepped up to the plate. Although the unit has only 38 members, these women have sent more than 10,000 packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan over the years. At home, these same members have helped a local 99-year-old World War II veteran with personal needs, paying bills, filing taxes, and other tasks. In Puerto Rico, Auxiliary members enhanced the lives of veterans at home by serving coffee, donuts, and goodies at VA and outpatient clinic facilities, providing transportation for appointments, and offering coffee and sandwiches for veterans after lab appointments.

In California, ALA members from East Pasadena Unit 280 actively sought out homeless veterans to provide assistance. They logged more than 12,000 hours to comb bridges, highways, parking lots, hill sides, and skid rows in their search for homeless veterans to offer them a hand up and a transition to a better life. Even during Christmas and New Year's holidays, they were out searching with the Vet Hunters. Homeless veterans can choose to accept the hand up and get off the street or not. Veterans choosing to remain homeless still receive weekly lunches from ALA members. Through their efforts, unit members have seen 425 veterans successfully removed from the streets.

As the Rhode Island Unit 34 Membership chairman studied the names on the membership roster, she noticed about 30 names that were unknown by current active members. Most of these unknown members had not been active for at least 30 to 40 years. This year, the Membership chairman sent every member flyers, news items about the unit, and solicited donations. As a result, one previously inactive member wanted to contribute items to a unit-hosted bazaar and purchase bricks in memory of her husband and in honor of her son for the post's memorial brick patio. It was soon discovered that this octogenarian also helped a WWII veteran and friend of her late husband three times every week, cooking lunch, and cleaning up a bit in his house. Over the year, this member's Service to Veterans totaled 624 hours. A second longtime member, who was just helping a friend, had volunteered four hours every week for the past five years. This unit was actively involved in the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Goal 1, Enhance Membership Strength, by encouraging opportunities to engage and retain members.

Junior members in Maryland provided a unique holiday surprise for hospitalized veterans by delivering a message in a bottle. Empty water bottles were decorated with pompons, shiny stars, and colored glitter. Caring notes were written, rolled up, and tied with string, leaving a long tail on the string. The notes were inserted in the water bottle with the string tail hanging out of the bottle and the bottle cap screwed back on. The messages in the bottles were delivered on Christmas, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Father's Day. Veterans, military, and their families received the benefits of many helping Auxiliary hands.

American Legion Auxiliary’s Impact Made Serving America’s Veterans:
Hours volunteered .......................................................... 5,114,000
Dollars spent ................................................................. $5,872,890
Value of in-kind donations received ................................ $13,069,128
Number of veterans assisted ........................................... 833,889
Number of Veterans in Community Schools presentations ............................................. 3,250
Number of new Service to Veterans volunteers recruited (previously known as Home Service and Field Service, now combined into one category “Service to Veterans”) .............. 38,420
Number of poppies or poppy items distributed ...................... 16,769,636
Dollars raised from the poppies or poppy items distributed ............... $2,499,975
Number of veterans who made the poppies or poppy items for distribution .............. 367
This report covers the programs, activities and accomplishments of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, its two standing committees (Employment and Veterans Preference and Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness), and the staff from July, 2015, through June 30, 2016. Since the commission and the committees always meet concurrently, all future references to the commission in this report will automatically indicate the inclusion of the committees.

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is chaired by James Oxford (NC). The division consists of Director Joseph Sharpe, Jr., Deputy Director Mark Walker, Assistant Director Davy Leghorn, Assistant Director Ariel De Jesus, Jr., Assistant Director John Kamin, and Administrative Assistant Jasmine Davis.

### 2015-2016 Meetings

During the period this report covers, the commission met for four regularly scheduled executive sessions. A list of those meetings follows:

1. Members and guests of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission met on Saturday, August 29, 2015, in the Hilton Baltimore, Holiday Ballroom, Sections 4 & 5, Second Floor, Baltimore, Maryland, in conjunction with the Ninety-Seventh Annual National Convention. A report on that meeting was made to the National Executive Committee on Monday, August 31, 2015. The complete text of that report appears in the Proceedings of the National Executive Committee’s Pre- and Post-Convention Meetings.

2. An executive session of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission was held in the headquarters of The American Legion in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 14-15, 2015. A complete report on that meeting appears in the Digest of Proceedings of the National Executive Committee, October 2015.

3. At the 56th Washington Conference, on Monday, February 22, which was held in the Washington Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC; commission members and guests met to hear the latest on subjects of concern to them.


### Legislative Appearances

A very important part of the work of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission is the preparation and presentation of congressional testimony on issues affecting the economic well-being of America’s veterans. During the period covered by this report, the commission staff testified before Congress, and also participated in the
preparation of testimony presented by other members of the Legion staff on several occasions.

The following is a synopsis of the congressional hearings and correspondence held from August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016, on matters pertaining to the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission:

- On September 10, 2015, the Assistant Director testified before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on “A Review of Licensing and Credentialing Standards for Service members and Veterans: Do Barriers Still Remain?”
- On December 9, 2015, the Assistant Director testified before the Subcommittee on Contracting and Workforce, House Committee on Small Business on “Supporting Success: Empowering Small Business Advocates.”
- On December 15, 2015, the Assistant Director testified before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, House Committee on Veterans Affairs on “Is Transition on Track?”
- On April 14, 2016, the Assistant Director testified before the subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on various pieces of legislation regarding “Education Issues.”
- On April 20, 2016, the Assistant Director testified before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on “A review of Veterans’ Preference in Federal Government Hiring.”
- On June 23, 2016, the Assistant Director testified before the Subcommittee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, House Committee on Small Business on “Beyond the Bench: Ramifications of the Supreme Court Kingdomware Decision.”

Administrative Activities

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission and its two standing subcommittees on Employment and Veterans Preference and Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness are responsible for ensuring that America’s veterans have the opportunity to provide, with honor and dignity, the economic necessities of life for themselves and their families. In order to achieve this goal, the commission and its committees work closely with governmental agencies and liaison to assist the organization’s members.

A staff responsibility is answering the large volume of mail and electronic mail that is received annually from veterans seeking information or assistance on issues which come under the commission's jurisdiction. While the staff can neither place individual veterans in jobs nor represent them in labor disputes, the staff does provide information, guidance and, when appropriate, referral. Besides correspondence from individuals, the staff also receives and answers frequent requests and inquiries from government agencies, members of Congress, congressional committees, private organizations, and other groups regarding veterans' economic issues.

Employer of the Year Awards

One of the commission's major programs is its awards program, which is administered by the staff. Through this program The American Legion pays tribute to those employers across the country who has established outstanding records in the employment and retention of veterans, workers with disabilities and older workers, and to outstanding members of the state employment security agencies.

Each year since 1969, the Legion's National Veterans Employment & Education Commission has sponsored an Employer of the Year Awards Program. This program seeks to honor those employers across the country that has established an outstanding record in the employment and retention of veterans. Prior to this year's Washington Conference, the chairman of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, James W.
Oxford (NC), appointed a seven-person subcommittee to review all of the nominations that had been received during 2015 in the Employer of Veterans Awards Program. The Commission’s Awards Subcommittee met to select the following National winners:

- **Large Employer**: New York Shipping Association, Inc., New Jersey
- **Medium Size Employer**: Stresscon Corporation, Colorado
- **Small Employer**: Operation: Job Ready Veterans, Indiana

**Employment Service Awards**

Beginning in 1993, three awards have been presented to the Local Veterans Employment Representative of the Year, the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year, and the Employment Service Office of the Year. These awards are given in cooperation with local Job Service offices across the country, to recognize truly outstanding veteran-dedicated staff members.

**National winners are as follows:**

- **LVER of the Year**: Nancy Brown, Wisconsin
- **DVOP of the Year**: Dwight Butler, North Carolina
- **Employment Local Office**: Fargo Customer Service Office , Job Service ND, North Dakota

**Other Awards:**

- **Enhance the Lives of the Disabled**: Outdoor Freedom Network, Texas
- **Employer of Older Workers**: First Transit, Texas
- **Homeless Veterans Outreach Award**: The American Legion Department of Georgia

**EMPLOYMENT & VETERANS PREFERENCE COMMITTEE**

James Fratolillo, Massachusetts, Chairman

The mission of the committee is to promote employment and training opportunities for veterans. To accomplish this, the committee works at the national level with Congress and various federal agencies. The committee does not place veterans in jobs, but rather, relies on its network of employment chairpersons to assist individual veterans in finding employment. Their Posts and Departments appoint these employment chairpersons. Occasionally, Departments also appoint them at the County and District levels. Additionally, this committee is charged with promoting veterans’ preference throughout the federal government and ensuring that agencies continue to observe all veterans' preference laws.

**VETERANS EDUCATION, OTHER BENEFITS & HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE**

John B. Sampson, New York, Chairman

This committee is charged with ensuring that veterans’ educational benefits provided by the federal government are sufficient and that every generation of veterans has substantially the same as, or better benefits than, the previous generation. In addition, this committee is to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits to which they are entitled as recompense for their military service on behalf of a grateful nation while continuing to push for federal and local governments to allocate adequate resources to combat and ultimately eliminate veteran homelessness.
Federal Veterans' Economic Programs

The following is a brief overview of the Commission’s interactions with those federal agencies, and their veterans' programs, with which the commission works regularly.

Education

The Post-9/11 GI Bill passed by Congress in 2008 was an effective upgrade for 21st century veterans using their college education benefits. It was not, nor can it be, a law so static that it cannot continue evolving to best meet the needs of student-veterans in an ever-shifting landscape of higher education and career training. The American Legion supports educational institutions that provide student-veterans with valuable education and support. Grants to establish or strengthen veteran centers on campuses can go a long way toward helping students succeed.

American Legion posts have been chartered on campuses nationwide to help meet the needs of veterans, which can include VA benefits assistance, understanding of PTSD and networking. The Legion is concerned about dropout rates and their relationship to the effectiveness, or presence, of campus veteran programs. The Legion supports legislation to fund programs to start, restart or expand student-veterans centers.

Licensing & Certification

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission continued its acclaimed work on licensing and certifications with its credentialing roundtable on April 1, 2016. This roundtable brought together a diverse array of stakeholders focusing on the construction, energy, and manufacturing industries. The roundtable yielded 12 substantial conclusion points, which will be revisited in a follow-up roundtable scheduled for mid-October 2016. In addition to reviewing the progress on stakeholder credentialing, advanced planning will be discussed for the 2017 National Credentialing Summit. The upcoming summit will continue to educate and foster collaboration among attendees - so they can return to their respective communities, companies or state legislatures - and work on removing the barriers that impede veterans and their spouses as they embark on civilian careers.

The American Legion was very instrumental in first drawing attention to the credentialing of service members and veterans. In 1997, The American Legion commissioned the report "Study of Civilian Licensure and Certification for Veterans," which detailed the problem while focusing on the areas of aircraft maintenance and healthcare. Since then, there has been a tremendous amount of momentum and success in recognizing military experience for credentials at the federal and state levels. Cooperation among The American Legion, state governments, private sector employers, institutions of higher learning and the federal government have been crucial to effect the necessary changes in policies and practices to fully recognize the education, training, and experience provided to transitioning veterans.

The American Legion will continue to work with the White House, National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, government agencies such as the Departments of Defense, Energy, Labor, Transportation and others, as well as congressional representatives, military training commands, credentialing boards and the private sectors.

Veterans’ Preference

The American Legion is deeply concerned with the protection of the veteran and the prevention of illegal hiring practices. Currently, veterans are filing claims after the non-compliance employment event occurred and may become financially disadvantaged while waiting for results of the claim. Proactive measures and continuous oversight must be exercised to protect veterans from unfair hiring practices, not just reactionary investigations.
The following steps taken by the federal government to protect veterans’ employment and demonstrates reactionary measures to assist veterans which may take months to resolve. Many veterans give up or do not file complaints because they must seek employment elsewhere or face serious financial difficulties. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) administers entitlement to veterans’ preference in employment. The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) provides assistance to all persons having claims under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). DOL is the enforcement authority for USERRA, and it processes all formal complaints of violations of the law. The veteran may then request that the Department of Justice (DOJ) litigate on their behalf but only after a certain period has passed.

Veterans’ preference is authorized by the Veterans’ Preference Act (VPA) of 1944; it only applies to federal government employment. It provides that most veterans are to receive an extra five points (ten points for disabled veterans) in receiving and keeping federal jobs. The Veterans’ Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA) of 1998 extended certain rights and remedies to recently separated veterans. VETS were given the responsibility to investigate complaints filed by veterans who believe their veterans’ preference rights have been violated and to conduct an extensive compliance assistance program. Veterans’ preference is being ignored by numerous agencies. Figures show a decline in claims by newer veterans compared to Gulf War I. In reality employment opportunities are not being broadcast. Federal agencies as well as subcontractors are required by law to notify OPM of job opportunities but these vacancies are rarely made available to the public.

The American Legion reiterates its position that protection of veterans’ employment rights should be proactive and continuous oversight must be emplaced to protect veterans from unfair hiring practices. Reactionary investigations and lawsuits are not sufficient. We further believe that the veteran must be protected at the onset of the hiring process, corrective actions to remedy the veteran’s situation in the veteran’s favor are not guaranteed. We recommend that DOJ provide a detailed description of their veterans’ employment activities.

A grateful nation created veterans’ preference to ensure fair treatment for those citizens who served this country in the Armed Forces. Veterans’ preference should play a large role in employing veterans and their spouses. Federal agencies need to make sure that their Human Resource personnel are properly trained to effectively implement veterans’ preference. The federal government has scores of employment opportunities that educated, well-trained, and motivated veterans can fill given a fair and equitable chance to compete. Working together, all federal agencies should identify those vocational fields, especially those with high turnover rates, for transitioning veterans who are trying to continue their service within the federal government.

Employment and Career Fairs

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission of The American Legion collaborated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to host a hiring event on Friday, February 19, in the International Terrace, Terrace Level, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C. This event started with an opening ceremony, which included speakers Eric Eversole, President, Hiring Our Heroes and Senior Advisor, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation; Michael Michaud, Assistant Secretary, Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS); Verna Jones, Executive Director, Washington, D.C. Office; and Harold ‘Dale’ Barnett, National Commander, The American Legion. There were 25 employers from various industries and over 100 attendees that participated in the Career Fair. In addition, the smaller roundtables (at the Career Fair) gave prospective employers opportunities to engage jobseekers in a more personal manner, creating a relaxed atmosphere where veterans felt comfortable practicing their pitches and seeking job opportunities.
The American Legion manned a table at this event. The table was manned by Davy Leghorn, Assistant Director, National Veterans Employment & Education Division and Bob Looby, Employment & Education Committee, Department of New Jersey. These Legionnaires discussed how The American Legion assists veterans with reinserting back to their local communities. Additionally, they answered service members/veterans questions about benefits and described the Legion’s programs as well as explained how to become a member. The employers and participants at this event were pleased with the outcome. The employers stated that the participants were professional and qualified. The participants liked that employers were from different industries and willing to hire veterans.

Additionally, on Friday, February 19, the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission hosted an Employment & Empowerment Workshop at the Washington Hilton. The workshops were designed to help veterans, service members and their spouses find meaningful careers in the civilian workforce, expand their networks and gain the tools necessary to stand out throughout the hiring process. The day began with a free networking breakfast, and then segued into employment/empowerment workshops where leaders in the public and private sectors offered guidance on how to properly use LinkedIn for networking and employment purposes, personal branding and financial literacy. Speakers for these workshops included Robert Smith, Financial Education Specialist, ClearPoint Credit Counseling Solutions and Sarah Worley, Senior Manager, Hiring Our Heroes, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Following the morning workshops, attendees were able to mingle with each other and prospective employers during a luncheon.

The new Job Fair/Workshop dynamic that The American Legion and U.S. Chamber created really has stepped outside the box, benefitting frustrated jobseekers. The opportunity to polish and use the skills they have been refining during their job searches seemed to tremendously benefit participants. Jobseekers stated that the workshops along with the Job Fair was very informative and filled with quality job opportunities.

The American Legion’s National Veterans Employment & Education Division, through its relationships, continues to play a vital role in assisting American Legion Posts to produce successful Job Fairs, small business development workshops, and employment training services throughout America. In addition, the staff of the National Veterans Employment & Education Division is also involved in a number of advisory committees. Assistant Director Davy Leghorn is a member of the Small Business Administration's Advisory Committee, and Deputy Director Mark Walker is a member of the Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Veterans Advisory Committee.

Aside from advisory committees, The American Legion is also a stakeholder and active participant in numerous government agencies and private businesses’ veteran initiatives, where our input into their programs is highly valued. The American Legion has a representative on the Department of Labor’s Advisory Committee Veterans’ Employment, Training and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO) and Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development. Lastly, The American Legion participates in the Veterans’ Entrepreneurship’s Task Force (VET-FORCE) business forums and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s Service Member’s Affairs meetings.

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission encourages Departments to urge members to volunteer for any employment events in their respective departments. We ask that volunteer staff include Service Officers, Employment and Homeless Chairpersons, Children and Youth representatives, as well as members from The American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion.

Finally, in a November 2015 economic report to Congress, it noted some relevant facts about veterans of the Post-9/11 era. Listed below are some findings pertaining to this demographic:

- 4 out of 5 Post-9/11 veterans are working or actively searching for work: Recent veterans have a significantly higher labor force participation rate than the overall veteran population because most Post-9/11 veterans are in their prime
working years. Males and those ages 25 to 54 years old are most likely to be in the labor force. Overall, Post-9/11 veterans who served in Afghanistan and/or Iraq have a lower labor force participation rate (78.2 percent) than Post-9/11 veterans who served elsewhere (83.1 percent).

- **Post-9/11 veterans face a somewhat higher employment rate than nonveterans:** The unemployment rate for Post-9/11 veterans averaged 6 percent over the past 12 months. Over the same period, the rate for nonveterans averaged 5.3 percent. The overall employment rate for veterans across all service periods averaged 4.7 percent. The unemployment rate for Post-9/11 veterans has fallen steadily since peaking at 12.1 percent in 2011.

- **The falling unemployment rate understates the challenge facing recent veterans:** One out of every two service members (53 percent) faces a period of unemployment after leaving the military, according to an analysis by the VA. However, most find work within six months. High rates of physical and psychological injuries and the stigma associated with the negative effects of combat zone experience can present hurdles to finding and sustaining employment for some veterans.

- **More than one in four Post-9/11 veterans in the labor force have a service-connected disability:** Of the nearly 2.5 million Post-9/11 veterans in the workforce, 28 percent report having a disability resulting from their military service. However, of those Post-9/11 veterans with a service-connected disability, 75 percent are in the labor force – either having a job or looking for one. Veterans with lower disability ratings are more likely to be in the labor force: 84 percent of those with a disability rating of 50 percent or less are in the labor force, compared with 67 percent of those with a disability rating of 60 percent or more.

- **Post-9/11 veterans earn more than their nonveteran peers:** Unlike veterans of earlier eras, Post-9/11 veterans typically earn more than nonveterans with similar demographic characteristics. In 2013, the median earnings of Post-9/11 veterans were about 11 percent higher than the median earnings of their nonveteran peers. The earnings premium persists across age groups, generally growing with age.

**National Veterans Employment & Education Commission Forum**

On Monday, February 22, the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission assembled in Jefferson West, Concourse Level, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington D.C., to address education, employment and small business concerns regarding veterans and their families. The meeting started with an update on the Kingdomware Technologies, Inc. case, which will be considered by the Supreme Court. In 2012, Kingdomware filed the claim against the VA in federal claims court alleging that VA failed to comply with the Veterans Benefit, Health care, and Information Technology Act of 2006 – a federal law which requires, in part, that VA evaluates subprime and prime contracts submitted by Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSBs) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses (SDVOSBs) before it evaluates contracts submitted by non-military contractors. Under the law, VA is required to award the contract to a veteran contractor provided the bid is reasonable and of fair value, and the veteran contractor is not the only veteran contractor who could submit a reasonable bid. VA has taken the position that the law’s “set aside” requirement for contracts submitted by VOSBs and SDVOSBs is optional and that it may continue to award contracts according to its usual procurement method – the Federal Supply Schedule (FSS) – which evaluates veteran-submitted contracts alongside contracts submitted by the general public. The American Legion, in support of Kingdomware, argues that granting the VA discretion in awarding contracts will cost millions of veterans the benefits their country owes them for their service. The
American Legion contends that the VA’s use of the FSS to purchase goods and services diverts up to $10 billion in contracts away from veterans each year.

Additionally, there was discussion on our continued support for Representative Michael Fitzpatrick’s bill, the Fairness to Veterans for Infrastructure Act. If enacted, this bill would amend current legislation to add VOSBs to the list of entities eligible for the Department of Transportation’s Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program. Such an addition would not presume that veterans are "socially and economically disadvantaged." Instead, VOSBs would become independently eligible for participation in the DBE program. By law, the federal agencies are mandated to award no less than 3 percent of all federal contracts to SDVOSBs. For a number of reasons a few agencies have not met this goal. One of the most noteworthy exclusions of VOSBs occurs in the Department of Transportation’s DBE program. Current legislation requires that states receiving federal dollars for infrastructure repairs have to set aside 10 percent for "preferred goods" of small businesses. However, VOSBs are excluded from participation. It is a misconception that this 10 percent is solely relegated to road and infrastructure construction firms. There are in fact a variety of industries involved, such as personnel, administration, engineering, landscaping, utilities and IT -- so this is an issue that affects all VOSBs. The Fairness to Veterans for Infrastructure Act is a bipartisan, common sense, and 'no cost to taxpayer' update of existing legislation, that redresses the exclusion of veteran small businesses when the framework of the DBE program was originally drafted.

Lastly, shortly after American Legion National Commander Michael Helm testified before Congress on the Legion’s legislative priorities in February 2015, Representative Fitzpatrick successfully added an amendment to rail infrastructure legislation. The amendment directed the Secretary of Transportation to conduct "a nationwide disparity and availability study on the availability and use of certain classes of small businesses -- including veteran-owned businesses. The forum speakers included: Emily Murphy, Senior Counsel & Policy Director, U.S. House of Representatives; Michael Fitzpatrick, 8th District of PA, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives; David Wallace, USN (Ret.), Military Relations Project Manager, Lockheed Martin Corporation; Jared Lyon, President & CEO, Student Veterans of America; and Harriet Fulbright, Former Executive Director, Fulbright Association.

Veteran Entrepreneurship

The National Veterans Employment & Education Commission (along with the Legion’s Small Business Task Force) conducted a two-day Veterans Small Business Workshop on Tuesday, February 23, and Wednesday, February 24, at the Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C. Approximately 50 veterans and military spouses participated in this event. Participants traveled from as far away as New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, as well as Maryland and Virginia.

The two-day workshop, “Small Business Roadmap to Success”, was specifically designed for service members, veterans and spouses who own their own businesses or thinking of starting one. The intensive entrepreneurship course was created by The American Legion in collaboration with local small businesses such as Vets GSA LLC, Goldschmitt & Associates LLC, and the National Veterans Small Business Coalition. The workshop featured informative sessions presented by veteran business owners and women entrepreneurs, and included representatives from the Small Business Administration (SBA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Caucus for Women Veterans in Business. Each agency and organization outlined key initiatives aimed at assisting veteran business owners and touched on the importance of tapping into available resources.

Topics at the workshop included: Realizing the Benefits of the 8(a) Program; SBA Loan Programs; TSA Contracting; Teaming, Compliance, Protests; and VA updates on Veterans Business Development. Presentations were given by Barbara Carson, Associate Administrator, Office of Veterans Business Development, SBA; Marc Goldschmitt, CEO,
Following the informational sessions, participants were invited to a networking luncheon where they interacted with federal and private sector representatives. Our commission understands that for many veterans, entrepreneurship is a viable option, especially for those veterans who may find the job market tough to navigate. Consequently, The American Legion recognizes how important it is that we assist and advocate on behalf for our veterans who are self-employed. This is why The American Legion is one of the few Veterans Service Organizations that have invested in tangible programs and services for veteran entrepreneurs.

The American Legion's Small Business Task Force is a consortium of accomplished veteran business owners who have volunteered to advise the Legion on legislative matters that pertain to veteran businesses. The group of 30 members share their experiences -- ranging from the public and private sectors -- to help inform the National Veterans Employment & Education Division on matters relating to federal contracting for veterans, procurement and other areas that affect veteran business owners.

**Home Loan Guaranty Program**

VA’s Home Loan Guaranty program has been in effect since 1944 and has afforded approximately 20 million veterans the opportunity to purchase homes. The Home Loan programs offer veterans a centralized, affordable and accessible method of purchasing homes in return for their service to this nation. The program has been so successful over past years that not only has the program paid for itself, but has also shown a profit in recent years. Administrative costs constitute a relatively small portion - less than 10 percent - of the total capital and operating costs. The predominant costs are claims costs and other costs associated with foreclosure and alternatives taken to avoid foreclosure. Each claim costs the federal government about $20,000. However, revenues that VA collects from different sources, including the funding fee that borrowers pay, property sales, and proceeds from acquired loans and vendee loans, offset this cost.

In 1982, PL 97-253 was enacted and imposed a ½ percent funding fee (1/2 percent of the loan amount) on all veterans using the loan program, with the exception of those veterans in receipt of compensation for a service connected disability. This was considered to be a temporary measure to help reduce the national debt. Unfortunately, this fee has become a fixture of the home loan program and, even more unfortunately, it has been raised numerous times by Congress since 1982. Presently, veterans using the program for the first time pay 1.40 percent of the loan amount and those using it for a second time subsequently pay 2.15 percent.

Although veterans are permitted to include the fee in the loan amount, it constitutes an added financial burden. For example, a veteran using the program for the first time obtaining a $200,000 loan will pay $2,800. For a second time user the fee on this loan amount would be $4,300. While this is substantial in and of itself, it is even more significant when you consider the amount of interest the veteran will pay on these amounts as a 30 year mortgage is amortized.

The following persons are exempt from paying the funding fee:

- Veterans receiving VA compensation for service-connected disabilities.
- Veterans who would be entitled to receive compensation for service-connected disabilities if they did not receive retirement pay.
- Surviving spouses of veterans who died in service or from service-connected disabilities (whether or not such surviving spouses are veterans with their own entitlement and whether or not they are using their own entitlement on the loan).

The American Legion strongly urges Congress to consider either eliminating this fee or significantly reducing it. Veterans should not have to make such a significant financial
sacrifice in order to use a benefit that they have earned as a result of their service to America.

**Veteran Homelessness**

On Wednesday, February 24, the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission hosted a homeless veterans roundtable that dealt with the benefits, programs and services that are available for homeless veterans and their families. The roundtable discussion centered around topics such as: Grant and Per Diem, HUD-VASH Case Management, Landlord Engagement, Prevention & Diversion, Collaboration, and Funding & Momentum. During the roundtable it was noted that VA and HUD reported roughly 40,000 homeless veterans on a single night in January 2016 (2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress). VA has taking decisive action toward its goal of ending homelessness among our nation’s veterans. To achieve this goal, VA has developed a plan to assist every homeless veteran willing to accept services retain or acquire: safe housing; needed treatment services; opportunities to retain or return to employment; and benefits assistance.

Also, VA has implemented a prevention initiative - the Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF), which is VA’s primary prevention program designed to help veterans and their families rapidly exit homelessness, or avoid entering homelessness. Also, mentioned was the successful Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) within the Department of Labor’s Veterans Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS). HVRP is the only nationwide program focused on assisting homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce. This program is a highly successful grant program that needs to be fully funded at $50 million. Currently, HVRP is funded at $38 million.

The roundtable panelists included: Kathryn Monet, Program & Policy Analyst, National Alliance to End Homelessness; Linda Kaufmann, National Movement Manager, Community Solutions; Joshua Stewart, Director of Policy, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans; Elisha Harig-Blaine, Principal Housing Associate (Veterans & Special Needs), National League of Cities; Shurhonda Love, Assistant Legislative Director, Disabled American Veterans; Jana Lynch, Housing Program Specialist, Salvation Army; and Bob Looby, Employment & Education Committee, Department of New Jersey, The American Legion.

To continue the momentum on assisting homeless veterans and their families moving forward, the group narrowed down their focus on several key issues to include:

- Strategic use of the VA’s Grant and Per Diem Program
- Effective case management for Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) participants
- Landlord engagement
- Prevention and diversion
- Increased access to mainstream benefits
- Alignment of resources

Lastly, The American Legion continues to place special priority on the issue of veteran homelessness. With veterans making up approximately 11 percent of our nation’s total adult homeless population, there is plenty of reason to give the cause special attention. Along with various community partners, The American Legion remains committed to seeing VA’s goal of ending veteran homelessness come to fruition. Our goal is to ensure that every community across America has programs and services in place to get homeless veterans in housing (along with necessary healthcare/treatment), while connecting those at-risk veterans with the local services and resources they need.
It seems impossible that an entire American Legion Auxiliary administrative year has flown by. Serving as your national president has been a much-appreciated honor and a year full of events I’ll forever cherish.

Throughout the year, I had so many proud ALA moments when hearing how units and departments served our veterans, the military, and their families. It’s clear that American Legion Auxiliary members are passionate about our mission. One of the best things about Auxiliary membership is that age doesn’t matter — you can join just after birth or later in life — and a variety of ages pitched in to do whatever it took to support the mission and our organization in 2015-2016.

We’ve been around for nearly a century. We know the needs don’t end when the ALA calendar ends. Our members are constantly taking time to share their stories; they have inspired others to help us make a difference in the lives of our veterans and servicemembers.

Whether it was raising funds through cookie sales, sending care packages to military, crocheting sleeping mats out of plastic bags for homeless veterans, or simply telling a veteran “thank you,” Auxiliary members not only made an impact on those we served, but we created opportunities to share what we’re all about with those around us. ALA-branded shirts and thoughtfully detailed elevator speeches allowed members to educate the public about who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

These types of efforts were among the reasons I was inspired to focus on “Keeping the Promise” during my term as your national president. May we all be reminded of the promises we made — to our veterans, to our military, to each other, and most importantly, to ourselves to support our eligibility.

In continuing that theme to keep our promise to each other, I have been amazed at the amount of funds coming in to support the Auxiliary Emergency Fund, which has a special place in my heart. It’s been incredibly impactful to see firsthand what a difference we can make when we help each other in times of need. Through the AEF, we’ve been able to deliver financial assistance to Auxiliary members whose lives were turned upside down after a disaster or crisis. The AEF is members helping members. Your generous contributions to this fund and the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation in 2015-2016 have made life brighter for all of us, and especially those we serve.

At the beginning of my term as national president, you often heard me mention the word “family.” That’s how much I believe in the power that comes from us joining with The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion to keep our collective missions alive for generations to come. It was such a blessing to serve an amazing organization in the role of national president next to National Commanders Dale Barnett and Kevin Collier. From the unit/post level to the national organizations, it’s important for all of us to continue working together on our important missions to serve veterans, their families, and be vital in our communities as part of The American Legion Family.

And, as you’ll discover in the national committee, officer, and department president reports throughout this convention guide, American Legion Auxiliary members in 2015-2016 concentrated on serving one another through effective communication, sharing, and a culture of goodwill. The ALA’s Centennial Strategic Plan and its five goals were absorbed into members’ long-term plans — a bonafide sign that all of us want our mission of service to endure for another 100 years.

But in the meantime, let’s all focus on doing our part to carry out the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan by creating an internal culture of goodwill, which will create a culture of growth. Let’s keep our promise to those we serve. Let’s remember those who, through their sacrifice, made us eligible for our ALA membership. They fought side by side for our freedoms. Let’s work side by side to support them.
VICE PRESIDENT
Mary Davis, Washington

The mission of the office of national vice president is to support the national president and plan the future shift in leadership. In August 2015, I was honored to be elected and thus began my term as national vice president. This position has allowed me the opportunity to support National President Sharon Conatser as she worked to support the ALA’s mission and inspire the unit member.

I began the year by facilitating at the Indianapolis Mission Training. This allowed me to analyze where we were and where we wanted to go with training. Changes were made to improve the member experience for the remaining trainings. It was great to be able to meet so many members. Also to see, firsthand, how taking national Junior meetings to the masses worked. We now know that a vast number of girls, who would never be able to attend National Convention, could actually feel that their membership was important to the organization. Additionally, they had a day of learning and meaningful fun.

Next, I represented National President Sharon at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in North Carolina. What a delight to observe therapy in action. The creative outlet in which the arts allow America’s veterans to heal is amazing. Many veterans discover talents they were not aware they possessed. This is an event every member should experience, whether it is a local festival or the national event.

What a great learning experience it was to travel to Illinois to represent the American Legion Auxiliary at National President Sharon’s homecoming. The Land of Lincoln holds a special place in the hearts of residents. The final event, the evening dinner, was special as a large number of American Legion Family members came out to honor Sharon.

Later, I was honored to spend Veterans Day with veterans around the greater Indianapolis area. I attended the city’s Veterans Day parade, met with leadership at a veterans transitional housing center, and enjoyed a chili cookoff at National Headquarters. I then went to the Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center to meet with Acting Medical Center Director Ginny Creasman. I saw firsthand what is being accomplished in the greater Indianapolis area to improve veteran health services.

At the Washington DC Conference, I enjoyed attending National Commander Dale Barnett’s testimony. It was great to see so many legislators in attendance and to be a part of one of our fundamental purposes — to lobby congress concerning the rights of veterans. After the conference, newly appointed ALA DC Office Director Carol Harlow arranged a great round of meetings for the upcoming leadership at the American Legion Auxiliary office in Washington, D.C. and at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We were briefed on various aspects of The American Legion, including legislative priorities, veteran employment and compensation, and national security. I was very honored to meet with Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert ‘Bob’ McDonald and Veterans Health Administration Director Sabrina Clark. We heard what their priorities were in improving services for veterans.

Then, in May, my husband and I traveled to Annapolis to attend the Naval Academy Awards presentation. I was pleased to represent the American Legion Auxiliary by presenting an ALA award to an outstanding midshipman.

I also participated in National President Sharon’s’s online coffee talks as part of a Centennial Strategic Plan initiative. It was very interesting to hear questions from members concerning our organization. These went very well.

I prepared for the 2016–17 year beginning with fiscal forecasting in the fall and then on to membership planning meetings. I attended several American Legion meetings, had numerous conference calls, helped plan the National Chairmen’s Meeting and then finally the Department Leadership National Conference. During the year, I saw the passion and motivation National President Sharon has for our organization. I hope that experience has led me to be a better communicator for our members and that I might impart that passion in the coming year.
Finally, it has been an honor representing the American Legion Auxiliary in my capacity as national vice president this year. I took every moment to enhance my leadership skills and plan for the upcoming year. To the members, thank you for this honor and support.

SECRETARY
Mary “Dubbie” Buckler, Indiana

The American Legion Auxiliary 5-Year Centennial Strategic Plan is mission critical. Everything at ALA National Headquarters (NHQ) is geared toward achieving the five goals adopted by the NEC. Staff members are volunteering their time alongside goal and strategy team members to ensure the ALA’s future. The Plan’s initiatives require a lot of time and effort as they move from idea to implementation, and all in addition to the daily whirlwind of operating a business that supports our membership.

We’re a big corporation. Our external audits again earned us the highest marks on our national finances, NHQ financial processes, federal grant compliance, American Legion Auxiliary Foundation finances, benefits, and Auxiliary magazine. Proudly, your NHQ received stellar findings — and again, no criticism from regulatory or watchdog groups.

Big multi-year project achievements include adding updates to the ALA Department Operations Guide, the newly revised ALA Poppy Program Guide, additional ALA Branding Guide and PR Tool Kit resources, and expanded ALA Foundation resources. The many ALA-branded marketing resources such as the 100th year logo, banner, and signage templates can be downloaded and customized for local printing. All help to achieve Goal 5 — with The American Legion, Build Brand Loyalty — which requires increasing awareness. The “Members Only” area on the national website now has more than 2,000 resource documents! The most popular: membership and scholarship applications and the ALA Department Operations Guide.

Launching the online dues renewal payment option gets kudos with more members paying faster and sooner, along with www.ALAforVeterans.org now being a responsive website that can be accessed by simply tapping an ALA icon on your tablet or smartphone. Now, nearly one-third of our website access comes via smartphones or mobile devices. ALA NHQ now has more than 108,000 members’ email addresses, and more than 1,180 unit users are online, a 50 percent increase in just two years. We thrive in a digital world, and will be showcasing at National Convention that new members will soon be able to join online! It’s all about empowerment and convenience!

Our ALA Call to Service Corps AmeriCorps/VISTA Consortium, now in its seventh year, has eclipsed $4.4 million in grants to ALA NHQ from the Corporation for National Community Service, resulting in nearly 300 ALA AmeriCorps VISTAs placed in nearly 60 ALA and external Consortium organizations. As the broker of these resources, we’ve greatly expanded national awareness about the ALA — who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

ALA NHQ is fully committed, soulfully and professionally, to ensuring the success of the Centennial Strategic Plan; resourcing the Plan’s strategies requires investing in ourselves from our reserve funds and looking at the adequacy of our dues structure. As the findings of the ALA Organizational Effectiveness Survey revealed, we must improve organizational effectiveness to strengthen the ALA and develop good leadership at all levels (Goals 4 and 3). Presentations on “Bylaws as the Framework for Civility” and “Fiduciary Stewardship,” plus the Department Secretary Organizational Effectiveness Training at ALA NHQ, are goal-centered successes.

We must foster an internal culture of goodwill (Goal 2) if we are to be around for future generations. Attaining Goal 1 to enhance membership strength by 2020 will happen if we succeed with the other four goals. Remember: half of our new members drop out by year three because they aren’t enjoying the experience of membership. We must reverse that brutal fact. Good news amidst all this: More people are donating to the ALA and ALA
Foundation — now nearly 82,000 donors! Members will renew only if they find personal fulfillment in belonging or are so proud of what they see the organization doing that they want to support it. Goodwill is the key to success.

**TREASURER**  
Marta Hedding, Indiana

It’s now been five years since the $4 adult (senior member) dues increase was adopted, and four years since it took effect. The organization’s FY13 and FY14 budgets were the first truly balanced budgets in a decade. But as our external auditor predicted, the dues increase was just a temporary fix; the FY15 and FY16 adopted budgets projected a deficit. The FY17 budget proposal projects a deficit of more than a quarter million dollars due to less dues income.

In FY12, dues income covered just 53 percent of expenses. In FY13, after the dues increase went into effect, dues still covered only 70 percent; and that percentage has dropped each year since. For FY17, dues are projected to cover just 60 percent of expenses.

The minimum cost to operate and deliver current NHQ services will be the same whether we serve 250,000 or 1 million members. So, looking ahead, we must do one of two things soon:

1. Immediately reverse the membership decline: Membership is 16,000 lower compared to this time last year, more than 81,000 less than in 2013 when the last dues increase went into effect. It will take dues from an additional 28,000 adult members to cover the projected FY17 deficit.

2. Begin raising dues in small increments to keep ahead of increased costs and the declining membership trend, as our external auditor has consistently advised. We cannot allow ourselves to get into the same situation as five years ago — going 17 years without adjusting dues. We need to fulfill our fiduciary responsibility and adjust our dues structure so that each year we can sufficiently fund our budgets annually adopted by the NEC.

The Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates Assessment of the American Legion Auxiliary revealed that members think our dues are low, and dues are not a factor in membership decline. The ALA Centennial Strategic Plan is all about where we must be by 2020 to ensure our mission endures for another generation. Our survival depends on our success at enhancing membership strength — by making membership meaningful. With the cost of national meetings and events rising nearly 15 percent per year, nearing $2 million annually, and more members wanting “online, on-demand resources,” we must look at more cost-effective ways to engage and support members of all ages and walks of life.

National events are costly. Reallocating expenses from one Junior meeting at National Convention to five national division meetings engaged nearly twice the Junior members, at a savings of more than $100 per participant. Growing Junior membership is a doable way to reach a million members! The Washington DC Conference costs the national organization more than $1,000 per the few 200 members attending. As our growth in website traffic attests, we can use online resources to engage and inform more members from all generations.

Everything in the Centennial Strategic Plan requires technology in some way. We have vastly improved technical capabilities the past six years and continue our digital drive in ways that benefit more members. The ALA Management Information System (ALAMIS) serves an ever-growing number of users at the department, district, and unit level, nearly 1,400 users at last count. Last year, we launched the Members Only area of the website, tied to ALAMIS, along with a responsive website for smartphone and tablet users. The Members Only area allows members to pay their renewal dues online. Soon, new members will be able to join online too! The latest: Online training for members at all levels of the organization will be rolled out over the next year.
This leap in technical functionality has enabled us to be more efficient and cost-effective in many ways. We can do more with technology to save time and resources for the entire organization, and provide an improved experience for our members!

**AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION**

Linda Boone, Oregon, Board of Directors President

The mission of the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation (ALAF) is to positively impact the lives of our veterans, military, and their families by funding programs of the ALA today and for future generations.

Founded in 2007, the ALA Foundation raises funds to enhance the programs of the ALA. Knowing that member dues alone cannot support the needs of Auxiliary programs, the ALAF provides a resource to engage additional investors interested in supporting our mission.

In alignment with the Auxiliary’s Centennial Strategic Plan, the ALAF is working on action steps to implement strategies that will accomplish the goals within our own strategic plan. One of those goals is to increase diversity in experience and talent among board of directors members. This year, four board positions were filled which will allow us to better achieve diversity and other significant goals.

The ALAF participated in its first #GivingTuesday campaign, raising more than $28,500! #GivingTuesday is a globally recognized day following Black Friday and Cyber Monday that is dedicated to giving back to charitable organizations.

Planned Giving opportunities have been promoted through Auxiliary magazine, ALA and ALAF websites, social media, and ALA eNews. Board members have started reaching out to individuals to explain how easy it is to make a planned gift.

The ALAF held a National Veterans Creative Arts Festival department challenge that resulted in $47,000 of donations for the NVCAF.

Donations are accepted online through ALA and ALAF websites. It’s simple, and you can schedule automatic donations monthly, quarterly, or yearly with one click.

Shopping through AmazonSmile takes seconds to do and generates a 0.5 percent donation to the ALAF from your purchases, totaling more than $1,100 in donations during the past two years.

The ALA Foundation awarded grants for emergent needs to units and departments through the Veteran Projects Fund to:

- Department of Connecticut: $3,000 to purchase a clothing label maker for use by Rocky Hill Home and Hospital for veterans
- Bataan Unit 4, Department of New Mexico: $8,470 to build an ALA-owned and branded gazebo providing an outdoor respite at Fort Bayard State Veterans Home
- Eugene M. Connor Unit 193, Department of Massachusetts: $1,600 to construct a therapeutic garden at Cathy’s House, a women veterans home
- Department of Illinois: $2,752 to furnish 13 child-friendly waiting room areas at Illiana VAMC
- Department of California: $8,334 to purchase learning tools for use at the Children’s Learning Center at Cabrillo Villages, a women veterans center
- Department of Nebraska: $3,116 for physical therapy equipment to be used at the Norfolk Veterans Home
- Department of New Mexico: $1,200 for music therapy equipment to be used at the New Mexico Veteran Affairs Health Care System

The ALA Foundation awarded the following local Veterans Creative Arts Festival start-up grants:

- Department of Vermont: $2,000 for art kits, promotional materials, and awards
- Department of New York: $750 for promotional materials and awards

By using the ALA Foundation’s IRS 501(c)(3) status, we assisted these departments with sub-grants:
Department of Illinois: $500 for the Christmas Gift Shop
Department of Rhode Island: $3,500 for ALA Little Rhody Girls State
Department of Hawaii: $5,000 for ALA Aloha Girls State

The endowment fund has grown to almost $700,000. The ALAF uses the interest to
distribute the net investment earnings back to the programs supported by the ALA. The
FY15 investment earning of $10,188 was used to support the ALA Girls Nation program.

The ALA Foundation awarded more than $40,000 in grants to units and departments,
and $57,188 was provided to the national organization this year. This success is because
of each of you who invested in the ALA Foundation to ensure the Auxiliary’s mission of
service endures.

CHAPLAIN
Bird Derrick, Idaho

With chaos and confusion rampant in our world today, we need encouragement that
carries us through. My watchword for this service year and the promise for all of life is
“Hope for our Future.”

In my nomination speech in Baltimore, I committed to grow in my relationship with
the Lord so I could share faith with you. I stated then that God is sovereign and is the hope
of our nation and this organization. Psalm 25:4-5 reads, “Show me Your ways, O Lord,
guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You
all day long” (NIV).

Verse 21 says, “May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.”
Those words complement National President Sharon Conatser’s theme of Keeping the
Promise. When we are faithful to honor our commitments, God is glorified and hope is
secured.

Becoming an admin on the ALA Chaplains Facebook group seemed overwhelming at
first. My technical skills were questionable. Yet the Lord provided excellent, patient
support from our national office. One Auxiliary sister said, “Bird, we don’t care about your
Facebook skills; we need your prayers.”

This tool allowed us to bear one another’s burdens in the work of prayer and give
thanks and praise for answers given. We protected privacy and preserved dignity by
adhering to specific guidelines. An Auxiliary member said in a post, “This is what I love
about Facebook — you can ask for prayers any time of day and someone is always there.
God bless.”

Thirty-nine of 52 chaplains submitted mid-year reports. Collectively, we sent
thousands of cards and made hundreds of personal calls and visits.

Life is messy. Our chaplains demonstrate strength of character as they seek God’s
wisdom and guidance, then roll up their sleeves to help. Many of us suffered loss through
injury, illness, death, natural disasters, and financial difficulty. Yet we allowed ourselves
to be stretched beyond the comfort of our personal bubbles, trusting the Lord to use us to
meet the needs.

Even when momentarily sidelined, we encouraged all of our members to keep their
promises and to offer hope. To those ends, we have collaborated with The American
Legion and contributed to the accomplishment of its aims and purposes.

The Chaplains Conference at The American Legion’s Combined Americanism
Conference in September was a highlight. I opened that meeting by singing “People Need
the Lord” by Steve Green. Then we gathered in unity to pray for American Legion National
Chaplain Ted Kelley, who has since gone to his reward.

It was a privilege to join American Legion Past National Chaplain Randy Cash in
praying with American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett just before his
testimony on the Hill in Washington, D.C. in February. There was a strong sense of family
among us.
We baked, biked, walked, ran, sewed and sold. We promoted, recruited, contributed, distributed, then rested long enough to do it all again. True for the majority of our membership. It’s who we are, what we do, and why we matter, right?

We asked and received answers to difficult questions that informed how we function. I’m grateful for those who provided legal and ethical counsel as we formulated recommendations to consider for our future.

Sometimes I say that I don’t love to write, but love having written. If the Auxiliary magazine’s Reflections have held import for you this year, feel free to use them wherever they meet a need. The intent of topics and word choices is to build up and equip.

God’s sovereign hand carved out this year for us to serve together. We are part of something pretty special. “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27, NIV). We are a people of hope who are keeping the promise.

HISTORIAN
Debra Noble, New Jersey

As historians, the single largest obligation we have is to record the events that occur during the year in which we serve, ensuring that the recorded experiences of our members can guide those who follow us. Those members who proudly serve as historians have certainly kept the Promise this year and have gone above and beyond in reporting the activities of our members, from the unit through the department levels.

Reports show that working the Auxiliary’s mission programs is the single most important goal in the minds and hearts of our members. At the center of everything we do as American Legion Auxiliary members, is the promise we make to work for our veterans, military, communities, and youth.

Departments have shared in National President Sharon Conatser’s promise as they enjoyed showcasing their members. There have been visits to various veterans nursing homes, transitional housing facilities, department conferences, luncheons, dinners, tours of the states, parades, and so much more, all recorded with great care and detail by our historians. In addition, the American Legion Auxiliary was proudly represented by National President Conatser during her Far East and Europe trips.

Our members eagerly broadened their knowledge of the American Legion Auxiliary by attending Mission Training events, the Washington DC Conference in February, and the Department Leadership National Conference in May. We have also kept our promise to ALA Junior members by including their meetings with Mission Training. By hosting the Junior meetings regionally, we offered more Juniors the opportunity to attend the training sessions they need as they learn the programs of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Once again, the American Legion Auxiliary proudly sponsored the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which was held in October in Durham, N.C. There were 51 Gold Medal Art entries ranging from works done in fiber arts, string arts, ceramics, woodworking and oil paints. Music therapy and the healing power of dance were evident throughout the festival. The American Legion Auxiliary kept our promise to veterans through our donation of $120,000 and thousands of hours volunteered by our members.

Each historian has a unique way of tracking events, and several historians shared handouts they designed and supplied to historians in their departments, including after-action reports and history-on-the-go brochures.

Promises made, promises kept as we showed we are the organization that has a committee, activity, or something of interest for everyone. We continued to offer a variety of methods to communicate with our members. Our efforts to be inclusive covered not only cultural and language differences (check out the new Spanish-language membership application available at www.ALAforVeterans.org), but take into account the varied ways our members kept up to date on Auxiliary news. From our award-winning magazine to ALA
While our Centennial Strategic Plan covers the blueprint for our future, the path leading to that future was forged, in part, by the two beloved Past National Presidents whom we lost this year: Helen Gardner served as our 1984–85 national president and also served as both National Convention chairman and national parliamentarian; Kris Nelson served as our national president in 2011–12 and was the strongest advocate for our Centennial Strategic Plan, maintaining her leadership role throughout her illness. Kris’s courage in the face of adversity and the inner strength that she shared with all of us will serve as our motivation to continue working the ALA mission.

It is up to each of us, as this administrative year ends, to continue to Keep the Promise to each other, our veterans, and the American Legion Auxiliary.

CENTRAL DIVISION NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT
Lynda Lancaster, West Virginia

The Central Division is home to our national president, Sharon Conatser, who hails from the Land of Lincoln, and “Keeping the Promise” is exactly what The American Legion Family did in 2015–16.

What a privilege it was to meet members and see them working the programs in our communities, promoting patriotism, their dedication, and their commitment to serving our veterans.

Illinois promoted a culture of goodwill to “purr more and hiss less.” The American Legion Family hosted ALA National President Sharon Conatser’s homecoming, which was an honor to attend, and meet new members. Department President Kathy Cisna attended a veterans’ retreat, Christmas gift shops, Abraham Lincoln’s and Truman’s Pilgrimage, and presented Josh Dogs at St. John’s CMN Hospital. Members gave Easter baskets to children of homeless veterans, hosted a hospitality tent at the Special Olympics, donated $15,000 to AEF, and more.

The Indiana Legion Family worked together with Junior member Deanna Woodburn to support the local veterans homeless shelter with 5,000 items of coats, shoes, food, beds, and cleaning supplies. Throughout the year, members of the Hoosier state collected coins, played games, and hosted bake sales. Their hard work allowed them to add $10,000 to the AEF treasury chest!

Collectively, Iowa members worked on a new website, presented many Quilts of Valor, participated in Honor Flights, parades, radio-thons, a telethon, birthday celebrations, a rodeo, and membership roundups.

Kansas members worked together as a team, promoting American Legion Auxiliary programs. Members were awarded a Veteran Projects Fund grant through the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation to set up three fitness stations at the Ray Miller Fitness Trail at Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Hospital. The Juniors collected enough aluminum cans to send two veterans on an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.

Michigan Department President Sue Verville attended four gift shops where she worked with veterans, helping them prepare for the holidays. Members worked with Juniors and met with members of the Canadian Legion Family. Their special project was the Veteran’s Court, bringing awareness for veterans who are in trouble and need help with the legal system.

Missouri Department President Gayle Metzinger reported that Show Me State members worked diligently serving our military and their families. They volunteered at the seven VA medical centers and VA homes. They reported serving 129,360 veterans, donating 83,497 hours, and spending $176,124 on veterans.

Ohio Department President Martha Setlock’s service project was “Food for Thought.” Members attending department convention and citizens of ALA Buckeye Girls State were encouraged to bring food for local food banks. The department hosted a “Poppy Shop”
honoring veterans who made poppies and the members distributing them. Members participated in Rock the Walk, collecting more than $6,000 for televisions for veterans. West Virginia Department President Susan Wade traveled more than 6,500 miles and attended all four VA hospitals and their gift shops. Members promoted our organization in their communities, attended the Memorial Day Celebration in Grafton, W.V., and participated in two national cemetery remembrances. Members of the Mountain State climbed hills one after the other displaying their love and devotion to those who make this country great — our veterans.

Wisconsin Department President Laura Calteux reported energizing the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program in the Badger State. Working with a grant, the department helped homeless women veterans and provided them with necessities. They hosted Bingo and made sundaes to help support the Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Units made more than 70 tie blankets for veterans. An Oak Creek unit hosted a breakfast with the Easter Bunny with games and an egg hunt for the children.

Thank you, Central Division members, for the privilege bestowed onto me to represent you, and the opportunity to meet our members and veterans in your departments. What a great year it was Keeping the Promise and honoring our commitment of why we joined. It’s an honor to belong to The American Legion Family!

EASTERN DIVISION NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT
Helen Skelton, Delaware

The end of the year is here, and what a year it has been! Looking back on all of the great things we accomplished in 2015–16, I am so proud of all Eastern Division states. Our members honored wartime heroes and their sacrifices with commitment to the welfare of all veterans. It is our duty to not only help our veterans, military, and their families through today, but to give them hope that tomorrow will be so much better. “Keeping the Promise” is a vow we need to keep well after this administrative year is over.

Members in Delaware worked various veterans-based service projects. Coupons, cards, and care packages were sent overseas, and members folded pocket flags and volunteered at VA hospitals. Here are some numbers that showcase the good work in Unit 28: 232 packages, 212 volunteers, and 1,789 hours of volunteering.

Maine worked hard to “Get on Track for Membership” this year. The department’s fall conference was full of fundraising, team building, and “train-tastic” ideas for building membership. Great job, Maine!

Members in Maryland had their conference in Ocean City. Every unit brought in beautiful centerpieces that were judged. The fun event supported the department’s fundraising efforts, a value so important to our organization. For the theme, members came in with butterflies of all sizes.

New York placed emphasis on our Children & Youth programs. Members served 18,800 children at a cost of $270,471 with 20,106 volunteer hours. Americanism is another important tool in shaping our youth: Members volunteered 35,066 hours on patriotic programs.

Speaking of family and the future of our organization, Vermont has such a bright future ahead. Unit 7 Junior members from Hardwick did some amazing things! These young women posted colors, an activity typically conducted by The American Legion Color Guard, at the mid-winter conference. It was so great seeing young people who are already excited and dedicated to serving our veterans.

In Pennsylvania, members worked tirelessly to support veteran programs. Volunteers at the VA hospitals were numerous and very active. Bingo, holiday Santa shoppers, and many more parties were celebrated. Volunteer hours totaled 65,992.

It was my absolute honor to be invited to the annual birthday luncheon of the American Legion Auxiliary in New Jersey. In the spirit of love, loyalty and friendship — markers of our wonderful Auxiliary — this celebration was enjoyed by all.
During my New Hampshire visit, I stayed at the Indian Head Resort, and it was so beautiful. Units were dressed in white dresses, navy blue hats, and red ribbons. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen 198 American Legion Auxiliary members dressed in white. It brought tears to my eyes and made me so proud to count myself among such a wonderful, patriotic, and dedicated group!

Connecticut had a special luncheon for members across the state. Fund-raising efforts were recognized, specifically a grant to help 12 units accomplish their goals to benefit our veterans, military men and women, and their families. Junior and senior members sponsored a raffle that raised an additional $350.

Rhode Island members did a great deal this year showing how much they appreciated the sacrifice and service of our veterans past and present. In the spirit of remembrance of our fallen, a Wreaths Across America memorial service took place at the RI Veterans’ Cemetery. A renovated VA hospital and facility is also in the works in Rhode Island.

District of Columbia members worked hard on membership goals this year. I am proud of their efforts, as meeting our membership goals is what will allow us to thrive as an organization and continue to make a positive impact for tomorrow.

Massachusetts rounded out my final trip as Eastern Division national vice president. It was a rewarding and memorable journey full of accomplishments and proud moments for each of our states. You should all be very proud of the year we had. I know I am!

For love of God and country, God bless America, and God bless each of YOU! Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving you this year as we served our veterans.

NORTHWESTERN DIVISION NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

Judy Twete, North Dakota

The American Legion Family: what a great organization to be part of! And, as a family member, you need to have a home. I never visited a department where I didn’t feel the comforts of home, the love shared with that family, and the true dedication of members to The American Legion Family. Thank you to all “families” for being so gracious and kind while I visited. Thank you from the bottom of my red, white, and blue heart!

Departments in our division did a great job carrying on the American Legion Auxiliary mission this year:

In Colorado, I attended a wonderful and tear-jerking event where a troop induction ceremony was presented. More than 100 men and women raised their right hands, taking the oath of office to defend the Constitution of the United States and our country. It was great to see that these people still feel that serving our country is something they want to do. The department is also very active in creating Quilts of Valor and sensory aprons that are used in the state’s VA facilities.

Minnesota Department President Sandy Fredrickson shared, “I believe the highlight of our year so far was the joint fall conference you attended. The comments were very positive!” Those comments made me feel that my visit was so worthwhile. Having Minnesota’s Creative Arts veterans perform at the fall conference was very impressive.

Minnesota, Land of 10,000 Lakes, is working very hard to establish policy. They are promoting and have implemented processes so their department staff and committees have better direction.

Montana has managed to keep total membership in the upper levels of the percentages achieved. The first units in each of the 11 districts to achieve 100 percent goal were awarded not only the “Promise Certificates,” but each received a check for their treasury of $100 from the Membership chairman. Montana had success in keeping membership at a great level this year.

North Dakota combined its department office to house both the secretary and treasurer, improving the entire department. The generosity of all units in contributing large amounts of money, material goods, and time to the Gladys Ray homeless shelter, the YWCA safe shelter for women and children of veterans, and Service Dogs for America has been a yearlong goal
of the department president and members. The writing of two grants for emergent needs at the Veterans Home in Lisbon to help with supplies for an art therapy section of their new shop, and a second grant for the training of Service Dogs for North Dakota veterans were worthwhile undertakings.

The Department of Nebraska kept busy this year working their strategic plan. The Membership chairman put together an outstanding program in support of Goal 2 of inspiring goodwill among members. She created a “No-Crab Zone” to show members that the department leadership team remains committed to promoting goodwill. Nebraska’s department leadership team worked together in support of Goals 3, 4, and 5 by developing the first district president training with attendance of close to 90 percent of their district leaders.

South Dakota engaged in a project for military personnel being deployed. Auxiliary units made pillowcases for soldiers and presented them just before they deployed. South Dakota emphasized Goal 2 of the Centennial Strategic Plan, initiating a year of internal goodwill. They used wooden puzzle pieces to go with the president’s theme for the year, “Joining Together for Our Veterans.” Each piece had a meaning: one for civility, one for leadership, and one for mentoring. The department proudly sent 25 members, including two Juniors, to the Mission Training in Minneapolis. In December, the department distributed Buddy Baskets with Autumn Simunek, Miss South Dakota.

The Department of Wyoming had its unique challenges and blessings. To be able to have a balanced budget for 2015–16, they established a line item called Department/President’s Project; they needed to raise $3,300+ to make ends meet. This averaged out to about $75 per unit. The fundraising was a hit. The amount raised was above the projected needs, and the budget was BALANCED! The department is financially in good standing. That makes for a nice feeling when moving ahead toward the ALA mission.

SOUTHERN DIVISION NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT
Flora Jean Craig, North Carolina

Members throughout the 14 departments in the great Southern Division took to heart ALA National President Sharon’s theme of “Keeping the Promise” to our veterans, military, and their families. Many projects provided help and support for those who needed it.

Alabama had an outstanding Junior Leadership Camp where Juniors learned about Americanism, Poppy, ALA Girls State, the judicial system, and ways to help veterans in their communities.

The Arkansas membership theme of “You Plus One” was successful as 272 new members were recruited, many more than in past years.

Monkeys were everywhere in Florida. They were used to help raise more than $29,000 for The American Legion’s Child Welfare Foundation. The President’s Project raised more than $57,000 for six Fisher Houses. The Membership “Monkeys” excelled as Florida spent much of the year at No. 1 in the nation.

Kentucky units raised $31,650 to provide clothing for disadvantaged children and provided $1,000 worth of school supplies to these children. More than $3,200 was raised for the Child Welfare Foundation.

Floods and tornadoes wreaked havoc in many areas of Louisiana. Fortunately, units responded and provided more than 2,000 meals, clothing, toiletries, and household goods for those who lost everything.

Mississippi units donated 264 rolls of decorative duct tape for the Home of the Innocent in Louisville, Ky., a facility for children suffering from traumatic injuries. Decorated casts, etc., brighten their days.

North Carolina provided for veterans at four VA medical centers and four state veterans homes. Units promoted Star Spangled Kids and provided Americanism programs in elementary schools.
Oklahoma’s emphasis was on veterans and their families with home visits, providing food and care items. Funds were provided for monthly activities in the seven state veterans centers and the two VA medical centers.

Puerto Rico adopted a veteran and his family after his wife died of cancer. Members provided them with school supplies, clothing, food, and money to pay bills. They also gave food, clothing, haircuts, and toiletries to the homeless.

South Carolina donated 350 Purses for Patriots to 94 disabled and homeless women veterans, including these items: thank-you cards, pocket-sized Bibles, gift cards, toiletries, and non-perishable food items.

Service Dog for Veterans was the major project in Tennessee. The goal was to raise $10,000 for one dog. With help from The American Legion and SAL, enough money was raised to purchase three dogs.

Texas promoted the Promise Purses project. At mid-winter conference, 1,500 donated purses were stuffed with toiletries and other items by Juniors to be donated to homeless women veterans across the state.

Virginia raised more than $23,000 to support building the first veterans home through Habitat for Heroes. Members donated 40 quilts to the Quilts of Valor Foundation.

Special thanks to Division Membership Chairman Susie Mash for her encouragement and support throughout the year. Kudos to Florida and South Carolina for leading the way in membership.

It has been a remarkable year of service for the Southern Division. I will forever treasure the wonderful experiences, friendships, and courtesies extended to me. I asked you to do your best and you did. THANK YOU!

WESTERN DIVISION NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT
Linda Workman, California

What an honor it was to represent the Western Division as National Division Vice President this year. The members took ALA National President Sharon’s message of “Keeping the Promise” to a greater level and showed what Service Not Self really means in our communities. I want to thank each and every member of the Western Division for the work they accomplished this year. You all made a difference in the lives of our veterans, military personnel, and people within our communities. I also want to thank those departments I was fortunate enough to visit for their friendship and great hospitality.

Although we were a little behind in our membership goals, you all tried to make our ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Goal 1 of “Enhance Membership Strength” a reality. I feel confident that by our centennial, we will have shown that the Western Division had what it took to make membership a main goal to continue working our programs.

The Arizona Legion Family raised $100,000 for the new Fisher House where a plaque will be mounted on the dedication wall. Their donations exceeded that of other veterans’ organizations in the state. Homeless veterans also were not forgotten, with donations of more than $24,000 going to the Tucson VA.

Juniors were a big part of our Western Division departments, and it was great seeing how senior members mentored them to continue our service to veterans while including them in all Auxiliary activities and utilizing our youth to the fullest extent.

Christmas Gift Shops and patient remembrances throughout the Western Division included many members, Juniors, Sons, and Legionnaires. The donations of goods from members were amazing. It warmed my heart to see our veterans getting Christmas presents for each of their family members and the dedication of our members who made it happen.

At the mid-winter conference in Idaho, members were greeted as soon as we entered the hotel by two young Sons of The American Legion members who thanked each Legionnaire and Auxiliary member for their service. All departments kept our Children & Youth programs in the forefront — thousands of dollars were raised to support the many programs within their communities.
While in Idaho, it was so interesting to have speakers from various organizations and community outreach programs tell us what they are doing for our veterans. What a great way to promote community awareness and work together with other organizations to make a difference.

Leadership programs also were a major theme this year within the Western Division, putting on seminars and workshops to increase our members’ knowledge of our programs. Members learned from Jeopardy questions to the great Willie Wonka challenges. Member breakout sessions lent themselves to interactive participation where real-life situations were discussed and remedies formulated.

Through all your hard work and mentoring, none of the departments forgot how to have fun while working for our veterans. We had cowgirls riding stick horses, Bunco games, farmer parades, Willie Wonka handing out candies to everyone, music, dancing and raffles galore.

What great accomplishments the Western Division has made this year, and I know your continued support of our programs will exceed each year’s expectations.

In the words of Gandhi, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Thank you again for the wonderful friendships and memories that I will cherish for a lifetime. God bless you all.

AMERICANISM COMMITTEE
Brenda Collins, South Carolina, Chairman

We’re sure the refrains of the National Anthem were heard more across our great country this year, as American Legion Auxiliary members took on the #ALANationalAnthemChallenge to spontaneously sing “The Star Spangled Banner” no matter where they were.

As part of a Goal 5 initiative from the Centennial Strategic Plan, Junior members challenged senior members to sing the National Anthem at last year’s National Convention in Baltimore. The Juniors went a step further, asking that the song be videotaped so that it could be posted on social media for even more people to witness the experience. Since then, we have been able to enjoy members and people from Maine to California and all walks of life singing our beautiful anthem.

“Get out the Vote” was another initiative ALA members supported at the beginning of 2015–16. Even though 2015 was not a presidential election year, members worked with voter registration offices to help people register to vote. On Election Day, members from nearly all departments helped transport elderly neighbors and friends to the polls to give them the opportunity to cast their ballots. This is the ALA Americanism Program in action.

Going the Extra Mile! Look out, Captain America, because Auxiliary members in Kentucky are superheroes! ALA members in Kentucky broke out of character. They worked the Americanism Program in numerous ways, from donning Captain America shields to distributing flags to Boys and Girls Clubs of America. During Americanism month in February, these ALA members visited schools and donated hundreds of American flags to students. They folded pocket flags and gave them to deploying soldiers and sailors.

Honor Guards from our departments presented the colors at community events and attended flag disposal ceremonies to show respect to Old Glory.

In Nebraska, units presented flag etiquette programs at schools and in unit meetings, teaching the proper way to fold the flag. Students were given comic books that explained flag etiquette and the Pledge of Allegiance. They also gave students rulers that featured images of U.S. presidents and small flags. In all, Nebraska ALA members distributed 3,397 flags.

To further promote Americanism, the ALA sponsored our annual essay contest around the theme “How do we keep Lincoln’s promise to our veterans and their
families?" The ALA Americanism Essay Contest now has six categories, with a new category for students with special needs. Thousands of essays were written and judged at the department level. Winning submissions were sent to the division chairmen, who voted on the national winners. The ALA is happy to report that four of the five divisions had a winner in all six categories. Congratulations to all of the winners!

A naturalization ceremony is another highlight of the Americanism Program. In recent years, Maryland has been able to collaborate with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Office to take part in this ceremony. This year, it was held April 29, 2016, in Baltimore. ALA National President Sharon Conatser was present during the ceremony. New citizens representing 51 countries all took the important Oath of Citizenship. There wasn’t a dry eye in the room as these new citizens took the oath. Auxiliary members gave each one of the new citizens a welcome bag containing literature about flag etiquette, information about the American Legion Auxiliary, and their first American flag! It was a momentous occasion for all!

These are just a few of the ways Auxiliary members are Keeping the Promise to our veterans, the military, and their families through the ALA Americanism Program.

AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND COMMITTEE
Beth McGinn, Delaware, Chairman

Auxiliary member Helen Colby Small of Burlington, Wisconsin, established her legacy by making a planned gift to the Auxiliary before she passed away in 1969. Colby Small, who was a member of Ross Wilcox Unit 79 for 40 years, bequeathed $106,000 to establish the Auxiliary Emergency Fund (AEF).

This year, ALA National President Sharon Conatser selected AEF as her president’s project because she saw firsthand how much damage a disaster can cause when a tornado hit her home state of Illinois. She also recognized the importance of continuing the tradition of members helping members. All departments showed their support by donating to AEF, representing 100 percent participation.

Faced with damaging extreme weather and financial emergencies throughout the year, 44 ALA members in 25 departments benefitted from grants awarded by the AEF.

The winter season saw record amounts of rainfall and flooding in Texas, Louisiana, and South Carolina, which caused hardships on residents, especially those without flood insurance. The Midwest did not escape Mother Nature’s wrath. Missouri and Illinois experienced flooding conditions that closed a main highway for 25 miles where many Legion posts were located.

Devastating wildfires destroyed millions of dollars of property in California, prompting an entire community to come together to assist displaced families and their animals. The community raised more than $5,000 and provided tents and trailers. Units also supplied food, water, clothing, and served meals to help some of their members.

The first two months of 2016 saw the second highest tornado activity in the past 10 years, impacting the southeastern and southern states, and many American Legion families.

Recognizing the need to help, departments and units stepped up their fundraising efforts. As a result, 17 departments reported using the AEF Plan of Action to host unique variations of the water bottle coin collections. The Department of Iowa raised AEF funds by hosting Diva Night, and the Department of Delaware had a special dance featuring a popular local entertainer. The event was attended by other Eastern Division department members and raised $3,000. Units manned tables at community fairs and department conventions, offering AEF brochures and copies of applications as one of the many benefits of joining the American Legion Auxiliary.

Departments received thank-you notes expressing gratitude for the AEF grants. Of one particular note is the heartfelt, touching letter from a member experiencing debilitating treatments for cancer after the recent loss of her husband to the same disease. She wrote,
“I am so blessed to have all of my ALA sisters in my life. I truly don’t think I would have been able to get through this most difficult time without them.”

This exemplifies who we are, what we do, and why we matter.

For more information about donating to the AEF or adding a legacy gift in your will, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org. Don’t forget to visit and join the Auxiliary Emergency Fund Facebook group where members can share information on natural disasters in their neighborhoods and spread the word that help is available.

HISTORY COMMITTEE
Cathi Taylor, Indiana, Chairman

Actress Phylicia Rashad once said, “Any time women come together with a collective intention, it’s a powerful thing. Whether it’s sitting down making a quilt, in a kitchen preparing a meal, in a club reading the same book, around the table playing cards, or planning a birthday party, when women come together with a collective intention, magic happens.”

If any group of women exemplifies this statement, it is certainly the American Legion Auxiliary. Since 1919, our members have kept the promise to care for our veterans, military, and their families. It is a story of how we have worked tirelessly toward this end. So that others understand what we’ve accomplished and learn our story, we must document and preserve it.

That is where the History Committee enters the picture. Through a collection of documents, books, photos, and artifacts, our story is conveyed. Our departments and units are learning there are many different ways to promote, collect, preserve, and share.

The Department of Iowa promoted preservation to its units at their mid-winter conference. Ideas were conveyed through a trifold display and PowerPoint presentation. In Florida, Unit 347 called out for donations, resulting in numerous gifts that have been photographed, catalogued, and made available on DVD. Missouri Unit 57 recently began collecting items and received a donated cabinet in which to display them. The Department of South Carolina purchased a display book to house charters from units that no longer exist. Through honoring a Past Department President, Mississippi Unit 50 received many of her photos and awards from the family for display. While Nebraska is not known for gold mines, the department believes they have stumbled on one after boxes of items were recently discovered.

Sometimes, we have to do the collecting ourselves. Florida Unit 220 is attempting to identify members in a photo taken circa 1970s by visiting a local museum and women’s club. Montana Unit 123 is looking for past historians’ scrapbooks. In South Carolina, Unit 178’s historian has interviewed and written a short biography of all its officers.

As we collect our history, knowing how to preserve it remains primary. It makes certain that future generations will know it as well. Unfortunately, two units learned that nothing is safe. Florida Unit 125 suffered a devastating fire, which resulted in the loss of many memories. However, members have begun to rebuild by displaying their charter and past unit president pictures in the post dining hall. Floodwaters damaged scrapbooks belonging to Texas Unit 95, but members were able to restore them.

Sharing our history is considered by many to be the best part! The Department of Kentucky has determined that social media is the way to go. They post pictures and trivia questions about the department, units and past presidents on Facebook. Units in New Mexico have donated pieces to local museums. Moving into new digs has provided the Department of Maine an opportunity to share its prized possessions.

Yes, when women come together with a collective intention, powerful and magical things happen. Let’s all be sure to learn our history. The more we know, the more we share. Then others will also learn just how powerful and magical the American Legion Auxiliary has been, is, and always will be!
In 1954, The American Legion endorsed the separate incorporation of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF). Since then, the CWF has granted more than $15.1 million to support youth-serving projects that seek to enhance the lives of children by addressing their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.

The CWF, in its 61st year, awarded $640,395 to 24 nonprofit organizations. These grants were determined during the annual meeting of the board of directors in Indianapolis Oct. 11, 2015. Following is a brief summary of the grants awarded for 2016.


All Children’s Hospital Foundation Johns Hopkins Medicine of St. Petersburg, Fla.: Awarded $25,200 for their project, “Pragmatic Acquisition of Language Skills — A Therapeutic Social Skills Group.”


American Legion Post 133 of Fort Kent, Maine: Awarded $1,630 for their project, “Children Sharing ‘Fishing Stories’ with Veterans.”

American Printing House for the Blind of Louisville, Ky.: Awarded $31,000 for their project, “Braille Tales: Sharing the Joy of Reading.”

Autism Speaks Inc. of New York: Awarded $32,070 for their project, “The Transition Tool Kit.”

Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation of Avon, Conn.: Awarded $6,800 for their project, “Taking Care of Me: Self Care for Parents Caring for a Child with CdLS.”

Defending the Blue Line of Hastings, Minn.: Awarded $10,000 for their project entitled, “Military Kids Scholarship Project.”

Father Flanagan’s Boys’ Home, a.k.a. Boys Town of Boys Town, Neb.: Awarded $34,448 for their project, “Boys Town National Hotline Teen & Parent Awareness Campaign.”


Joe Foss Institute of Scottsdale, Ariz.: Awarded $20,000 for their project, “Veterans Inspiring Patriotism in Youth.”

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation of Los Angeles: Awarded $39,500 for their project “The First 12 Months.”

Kids in Danger of Chicago: Awarded $15,000 for their project, “Safe From the Start: Safety Booklet.”


National Children’s Alliance of Washington, D.C.: Awarded $60,360 for their project, “Preventing Youth-on-Youth Sexual Abuse: Recognizing & Addressing Children with SBPs.”

National Hemophilia Foundation of New York: Awarded $17,000 for their project, “Playing It Safe For Kids.”

Organization of Autism Research of Arlington, Va.: Awarded $19,920 for their project, “Kit for Kids Outreach 2016.”

Spina Bifida Association of Forest Hills, N.Y.: Awarded $25,000 for their project, “Songs of Love Outreach Project.”

The American Legion National Headquarters of Indianapolis: Awarded $75,000 for their project, “Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) Program.”

The National Children’s Cancer Society of St. Louis, Mo.: Awarded $25,000 for their project, “Sun Day–Fun Day.”

ThinkFirst Foundation of Naperville, Ill.: Awarded $21,100 for their project, “Injury Prevention Reinforcement Materials.”

Young Marines of Washington, D.C.: Awarded $50,000 for their project, “Young Marines Drug Demand Reduction.”

Members of The American Legion Family are the primary contributors to the success and growth of the Child Welfare Foundation. The Sons of The American Legion to date have contributed nearly $7 million or almost 50 percent of all donations. Your continued support allows CWF to continue funding projects that improve the quality of life for our nation’s children. To learn more about the grant recipients’ projects, visit www.legion.org/childwelfare.

CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMITTEE
Kathy Dungan, Mississippi, Chairman

One of our nation’s greatest assets is our youth. American Legion Auxiliary departments and units recognize this and are dedicated to protecting, caring for, and supporting today’s children and youth, especially those of our military and veterans.

Auxiliary members went above and beyond to enhance the lives of children and youth, some who were facing hardships and challenges, by providing needed items, financial support, comfort bears and toys, backpacks, safety and educational information, and scholarships. Our generous donations of financial support and volunteer hours made a difference in their lives.

Star Spangled Kids is a program that educates children and youth about patriotism, Americanism, and our U.S. Constitution. School children across the United States were given American flags, copies of the U.S. Constitution, lessons on flag folding, our country’s history, patriotism, and Americanism. Local veterans partnered with schools to give presentations and share their personal stories.

Working hand in hand as a Legion Family, units and departments supported The American Legion’s programs by distributing their brochures at schools and events. The Department of Virginia provided 277 Halloween safety brochures in schools and worked with local police to help them with their “fingerprint the children” program. They also provided, as did many other units, The American Legion’s comic books and brochures, such as “I Pledge Allegiance,” “Our Country’s Flag,” and “Bridging the Gap.” Beads of Courage, a grant recipient of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, was supported this year by a unit in Florida. Beads of Courage is a program that helps and supports children with catastrophic illnesses such as cancer. Over 3,000 bead bags were sewn, almost $6,000 was donated, and 24 members participated in the “Carry a Bead” program for a terminally ill child.

Kids of active military were always in the forefront of our minds, and we recognized them for their sacrifices. One way was “Kids of Deployed are Heroes 2,” an American Legion Auxiliary program honoring military children who may be experiencing a separation from one or both deployed parents. Units created or purchased recognition buttons or stickers and distributed these to military children to recognize their sacrifices. Military children who had a parent or sibling deployed were given G.I. Josh plush dogs, with the accompanying story book to help them through the difficult time of their loved one being away. Many units assembled and delivered hero packs filled with an assortment of items to military kids and families.

The Auxiliary’s Youth Hero and Good Deed awards were created in 2002 to recognize the heroism and kind acts of youth under age 18. So far, more than 100 awards have been given this year, and many departments have submitted nominations. Youth Hero Awards
were given to those who showed bravery, such as Isaiah from West Virginia who rescued his father who fell down a well. These kids made a positive difference in their neighborhoods and communities.

This year, Auxiliary members and the entire Legion Family were visible in their communities providing care, support, and protection for our nation’s children. New Hampshire C&Y Chairman Sharon Cook expressed it best: “Our children are our future, and we need to embrace the opportunities to help them get a better start in life and help them achieve their dreams.” We try “to preserve the integrity of the individual family unit while striving to improve conditions for all children.”

COMMUNITY SERVICE COMMITTEE
Nancy Hansen, Connecticut, Chairman

ALA members across the United States stepped up to work the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary this year. They supported our programs in many ways. As with many of our programs, Community Service activities overlapped with other programs, and our members chose to report their hours in different places. All activities, no matter where they were reported, showed how involved our members are. Some of the areas of overlap include Americanism, Children & Youth, National Security, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

Members participated in community beautification days, marched in patriotic parades, helped with food pantries, collaborated with their posts to support Boy Scouts and Girl Scout troops, helped clean up cemeteries, placed new American flags on the tombstones of veterans, supported the Wreaths Across America event, worked with their local nursing homes to knit and crochet hats and scarves given to homeless veterans during stand downs, worked with their local American Red Cross chapters to sponsor and volunteer at blood drives, and participated in Community Emergency Response Team programs, ALA-suggested days of service like Make a Difference Day, welcome home events, Habitat for Humanity builds, and job/career fairs for veterans and their spouses.

The Department of Delaware collected gently used purses that they filled with basic hygiene products for women veterans on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a national day of service. Seven hundred purses were filled and donated to various organizations serving our homeless veterans. In the Department of Texas, Junior members did a similar project as part of their mid-winter conference.

Unit 47 in Filer, Idaho, where the town’s population is 2,508, hosted their annual “Turkey Carnival.” This event, which dates back to just after World War II, is open to the public and is held at the post hall the Friday before Thanksgiving. The Legion Family provides inexpensive meals for the community complete with homemade pies, and the event is followed by Bingo games where turkeys are the door prizes. When the tradition first started, live turkeys were used and kept in a truck in front of the post until the year the turkeys got loose and had to be rounded up. Now they use frozen turkeys. What a great community event for a small town!

One unit, along with their Legion Family in the Department of Oregon, hosted a free Thanksgiving dinner for the whole community. They started collecting supplies in early September and served almost 400 meals.

In the Department of Washington, ALA members volunteered at the DuPont Community Garden. Half of what is grown at the garden is given to the local food banks, with 20 percent specifically marked for veterans, servicemembers, and families in need.

In the Department of Alabama, a Good Deed Award was given to a local teenager. The young woman needed to bring three canned items to attend a concert, but she went above and beyond by collecting 300 canned good items for “Feed our Children Now.”

ALA members also worked on the Centennial Strategic Plan in many ways. They wore Auxiliary-branded clothing or pins while carrying out their unit’s programs, as well as while out in the community. They worked with their posts to help strengthen the bond
within the Legion Family, but most importantly they let their communities know who we are, what we do, and why we matter. Auxiliary members reached out and made a difference in the lives of our veterans, current servicemembers, their families, and the communities in which they live.

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS COMMITTEE
Martha Lee Thatcher, Ohio, Chairman

Over the past few years at the department, district, and unit levels, our American Legion Auxiliary members have been busy grappling with the task of updating their Constitution & Bylaws. This is very important work, particularly when you understand that none of them can be in conflict with those at the higher levels. But once the work is completed, do we take the next step? Do we make sure that every member has a copy of the governing documents? Do we take the time to make sure members understand them? As ALA members, do we take the time to read and understand the words?

The purpose of the Constitution & Bylaws Committee is to inform and educate our members on the importance and power of properly written, revised, and updated documents, as well as policies and procedures at all levels of our organization. Having well-written governing documents makes for stronger units and creates an environment that allows for goodwill among our members.

The national Constitution & Bylaws Committee is rather small: a chairman, vice chairman, three members, and a program coordinator. When we met as a committee in Baltimore, I was delighted to discover that each of us requested an appointment to this committee because of a deep interest in Constitution & Bylaws. Quickly, assignments were made for each member to establish two-way communication with every department Constitution & Bylaws chairman in her division and begin sending a monthly message filled with Constitution & Bylaws facts.

As national Constitution & Bylaws Committee chairman, one of my goals this year was to offer units and departments tips on how to create activities that would take the mystery out of learning about Constitution & Bylaws and make it fun. As a team, we created “seek and find” word and parliamentary challenge games, and encouraged members to play them at unit meetings and have fun while learning.

At the end of the year, it was a delight to read the variety of ways departments responded to this challenge. Not only were these games played at department events, but also at individual units. Members discovered that their governing documents are neither intimidating nor mystifying, and that learning what these documents contain does not have to be boring.

As proud ALA members, we know that a new unit means the Auxiliary is reaching out in another community. It is crucial that a new unit gets started on the right foot. In the spirit of goodwill, leadership must step in to build a relationship of trust, and help them write a solid Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules. Those words can be intimidating, but it is our job to make the members understand that unit Constitution & Bylaws are their best friend; they help to ensure fairness and protection for all members.

Be a mentor to this new unit, answer questions, offer suggestions, and have fun!

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
Susan Britton, New York, Chairman

“A good education is the key to success.” Members across the nation have ensured that the American Legion Auxiliary’s Education Program was promoted to the fullest extent while striving to achieve the five goals of the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan.

This American Legion program’s reach included activities such as general assemblies on flag etiquette, educational facts about the U.S. Constitution, book fairs, art contests, student mentorship, and participation in community events that help us educate our youth.
In all, with the name changed from Veterans in the Classroom to Veterans in Community Schools, 3,250 reported programs were held with veterans sharing stories about their military experiences, the importance of freedom, and what active-duty military life was like. Also, members demonstrated the POW/MIA Table presentation, told the poppy story, and shared facts about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They placed special focus on military children, allowing students to share stories about a relative’s military service.

Departments worked closely with student veterans by supporting and assisting them with their pursuit of higher educational opportunities. A total of 101 units reported various activities, including the posting of colors on campuses while collaborating with student veterans groups at colleges and universities.

The presentation of scholarships enhances our community recognition as 1,177 unit scholarships totaling $610,560 were awarded this year. Also, 355 department scholarships totaling $269,627 were awarded.

Plenty focus was placed on the Give 10 to Education program this year. Departments reported that 647 certificates were presented to participants. Maryland donated 7,500 in school supplies valued at $16,000; Florida donated $31,625 worth of supplies; and California donated 30,749 items valued at $34,854. Great job!

American Education Week found our members recognizing school personnel with thank-you notes, fruit baskets, and break room goodies. Kansas Unit 192 thanked 419 school employees with snack size M&Ms valued at $1,800. Members filled in as teacher aides, spoke on the history of the American flag, and distributed flags, U.S. president rulers, and flag stickers to students.

During Teacher Appreciation Week, members hosted luncheons and delivered May baskets, fruit trays, flowers, and cakes to encourage the teachers who prepare our youth for a promising future.

Departments provided backpacks filled with supplies, including food, clothing, and books to students. ALA members assisted with field trips, participated in literacy programs, tutored students, and served as “secret” grandparents and pals. Maine filled 261 backpacks with supplies valued at $7,830, while Michigan adopted 18 schools and assisted students with reading challenges.

Members also helped disadvantaged children in numerous schools by donating art supplies, coats, hats, scarves, Christmas stockings, backpacks filled with food, school supplies, and athletic shoes. In all, 304 units reported activity in this category. One department adopted a school nurse and donated underwear, sweatpants, and shirts for children who experienced accidents. What an awesome idea!

Along with other members from this committee, I was honored to take part in the judging of the Samsung Scholarships for this year. What a remarkable group of applicants we were presented with. New eligibility/award rules are forthcoming for the 2017–18 American Legion Legacy Scholarship. We were thrilled to work with The American Legion. It was great to be a part of the decision to expand this scholarship program, which will significantly help many more students.

A special thanks to every department Education chairman as we achieved 100 percent reporting for both mid-year and year-end reporting. Congratulations on a job well done. Your efforts exemplify the concept of Service Not Self.

A quote from the philosopher John Dewey summarizes the hard work of our Education program: “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

FINANCE COMMITTEE
Nicole Clapp, Iowa, Chairman

The American Legion Auxiliary’s national Finance Committee is comprised of five appointed members, each serving a five-year term. The primary role of the committee is to develop the annual proposed budget and review the national financial reports.
National Finance Committee members review the draft budget and make any adjustments that may be necessary to reflect new or changing goals. The committee recommends a budget for the National Executive Committee’s consideration and adoption. Additionally, the national Finance Committee oversees the financial policies of the organization, reviews the annual audit of the American Legion Auxiliary and ALA Foundation, and makes fiscal policy recommendations to the National Executive Committee for action to ensure that the ALA national organization is meeting nonprofit benchmarks and governmental mandates.

One member of the national Finance Committee is also designated to serve as liaison to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors, and another committee member is designated as liaison to the American Legion Auxiliary national Audit Committee. The fiscal performance of the national organization for the 2015–16 fiscal year has been positive.

With the positive performance of our investments augmenting revenue derived from dues, last increased at the 2011 ALA National Convention and which became effective with the 2013 ALA membership year, we were able to continue to underwrite the costs for three department representatives to attend the Department Leadership National Conference, and maintain department visits by the national division vice presidents. With Reserve Funds, we continued organizational effectiveness training for department secretaries at ALA National Headquarters, and resourced Phase II of the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan, which included developing the ALA Academy, an organizational effectiveness training program aimed at improving the ALA’s capacity to deliver its mission, and issuing 17 ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Department Achievement Awards as of May 31, 2016.

The successful fundraising efforts by our direct mail vendor continued this fiscal year with three appeals designated for the Auxiliary and one for the ALA Foundation. Fiscal year donations as of May 31, 2016, totaled a net $468,000. The analysis of 2015 direct mail donations indicated 153,383 gifts were received. Of those gifts, 98,967 came from ALA members, and 54,416 came from non-ALA members. The ALA continues to be fortunate to receive such tremendous support from donors outside the ALA!

In fiscal year 2016, the number of people applying for Auxiliary USAA Credit Cards continued to increase. Since inception, 6,916 Auxiliary USAA Credit Cards have been issued, and $30 million has been charged by Auxiliary USAA Credit Card cardholders. Based on the growth in the number of cards issued and cardholder usage, the Auxiliary USAA Credit Card Program royalty revenue shared with departments in fiscal year 2016 is expected to be $12,500. Please consider obtaining an Auxiliary USAA Credit Card and charge (responsibly, of course!).

Your national Finance Committee continues to believe in the value and knowledge gained by members through ALA Mission Trainings and national Junior meetings. On behalf of the national Finance Committee, thank you for your dedication, commitment, and generous financial support of the Auxiliary’s tireless efforts to fulfill our mission.

ALA GIRLS NATION COMMITTEE
Pamela Ray, Illinois, Chairman

The excitement among American Legion Auxiliary Girls State directors and chairmen was evident this year as they devoted their efforts to improving upon last year’s program and making each session better than the one before. These ladies shared their plans with our committee and the national organization, submitting end-of-the-year reports from all 50 states!

For the first time in 34 years, the Department of Hawaii held an ALA Aloha Girls State program, thanks to the support they received from the ALA, a local high school teacher, a retired West Point graduate, and two ALA Girls State alumnae. It truly was a community effort.
ALA Girls State programs throughout the country continued to foster future leaders, good citizens, and active volunteers by working the mission of the ALA. We heard incredible stories about ALA Girls State participants making a difference in the lives of veterans and servicemembers. The Department of Iowa raised funds for “Paws & Effect,” an organization that acquires service dogs for veterans. Washington’s ALA Evergreen Girls State has a friendly Nationalist/Federalist competition to raise funds to support ALA programs. This past year, they raised enough money to send four veterans on Honor Flights. The Department of Michigan made plans to generate donations for Veterans Courts, a program that helps veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or alcohol and/or drug abuse. The Department of Missouri donated flip-flops to be used as shower shoes for veterans served by Landstuhl Hospital. ALA Empire Girls State in New York made Christmas cards for troop care packages. The Department of Nebraska made blankets and shadow boxes for veterans in VA homes. Kansas launched the project “Coupons for Our Troops” to benefit military families serving on bases outside the United States.

In Minnesota, ALA Girls State participants gave gift cards to veterans and their families served by two Fisher Houses at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. The Department of Oregon participated in Holiday Mail for Heroes. Citizens of ALA Volunteer Girls State in Tennessee sang at the VA medical center in Nashville and visited veterans receiving transfusions or chemotherapy. The Department of Kentucky hosted three citizens from the military base in Cuba. Every ALA Girls State program in the country reported some type of service project supporting our mission.

It also was encouraging to hear that several departments reported an increase in delegates this year. The Department of Arkansas added two more cities to its program to accommodate more than 900 citizens! The Department of Texas reported it has a waiting list for its program.

Many departments used ALA Girls State alumnae as counselors, house moms, and staff members. Illinois reported that three of the four leaders in its program this year were ALA Girls State alumnae, and that six citizens from last year joined the ALA.

All this demonstrated that tracking your alumnae can strengthen your ALA Girls State program as well as our organization. ALA Unit 116 in Louisa, Va., reported that an alumna of ALA Virginia Girls State was so impressed with the program and the ALA that she joined her unit, volunteered to chair fundraising efforts to send girls to ALA Girls State, and encouraged her mother to join the ALA. Her mother is now treasurer of that unit.

I wish I could share more of the excellent work that each department is doing. These are just a few highlights. ALA Girls State programs are “Keeping the Promise” as they serve youth, veterans, active military, and communities.

JUNIOR ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE
Coral May Grout, Massachusetts, Chairman

This year, the NEC approved changing from one national Junior meeting held at National Convention to holding five national meetings, one in each division, for numerous reasons. Some Juniors attended meetings outside of their own division, particularly if the travel distance was greater. Good news: More than 80 percent of our Junior participants this year had never attended a national meeting. So, as we had anticipated when moving to more national meetings, we were able to reach more Junior members. The Juniors were enthusiastic as they participated in a variety of leadership activities, including flag folding, creating cards for veterans and active-duty service members, making poppies collaboratively with senior members, and playing leadership games. In all, feedback on the new structure was very positive.

Our committee received 100 percent department reporting. The level of involvement within each department varied. One department only had one Junior member, making it difficult to hold department activities. Three departments had no Junior Activities chairman, but the department presidents reported their activities. All other departments
demonstrated their commitment to the future of the Auxiliary and the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan by encouraging and mentoring Junior members.

Junior members were asked to accomplish five major goals this year: 1. Increase their membership (Centennial Strategic Plan Goal 1); 2. Become engaged in the American Legion Auxiliary’s programs (Goals 2, 3, and 4); 3. Become engaged in service projects for our veterans, military, families, and Legionnaires (Goal 5); 4. Participate in the Patch Program; and 5. Increase awareness of the National President’s Scholarship Fund.

Juniors participated in a wide range of activities throughout the year. Areas with the greatest reported involvement were Veterans Affairs hospital volunteering (including parties for veterans, creating hygiene/ditty bags for patients, and making favors for holidays); hosting community holiday activities; making and delivering care packages and cards for active-duty service members; visiting nursing homes to sit with patients; engaging in poppy activities; leadership skills development; showing our brand; helping homeless veterans; and decorating graves at Memorial Day. Each activity promoted Service Not Self. In several departments, the Junior Activities Program resulted in new Junior members, as well as some new senior members!

Several unique projects were reported. Juniors in the Department of Virginia created a video explaining the U.S. Constitution. Juniors in South Dakota picked grapes for an injured farmer. In Maine, Juniors collected lawn games which were donated to veterans homes.

A collaborative project between several divisions at ALA National Headquarters and the Junior Activities Committee resulted in the design and development of a new History Patch for our Juniors to earn. Thirty-three departments reported that their Juniors were participating in the Patch Program. Promoting the new patch was easy thanks to social media networking. Many departments reported that their Junior members used the ALA Juniors Facebook page (www.facebook.com/alajuniors).

Overall, departments were quite active with Junior programs. During 2015–16, 98 Juniors attended a national Junior meeting, 1,228 patches were earned, 22 departments participated in the Patch Program, and 20,407 volunteer hours were performed by Juniors. Also, Juniors raised $39,388.94 through ALA projects. There were also some standout departments: The Department of Colorado reported the greatest number of hours for Junior Activities at 2,689. The Department of New York reported the greatest amount of funds raised for ALA projects by Juniors, with the members raising $6,628.69.

Our Juniors are an integral part of the Auxiliary’s future. They truly demonstrated Service Not Self and a commitment to the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan throughout all they accomplished. JUNIORS ROCK!

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE
Martha Corriher, North Carolina, Chairman

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” — John C. Maxwell

American Legion Auxiliary members from around the world showed they were leaders who knew the way, went the way, and showed the way in getting the job done. This committee made contact with all departments, using various methods to contact an officer in each department to report 100 percent activity in the Leadership Program.

Challenges were given to create new and exciting ways to explain Leadership and get members interested in learning more about our programs, prompting them to work the program. As a result, our members became more knowledgeable about the Auxiliary and how they could take charge of many projects in their units, districts, and departments.

Many departments reported an all-time high of members taking the Junior and Senior Leadership Correspondence Course. The Central Division reported 392 seniors and 11 Juniors completed the course. Based on reports, the total number of Auxiliary members taking the course was 795. Departments said the course was taken, but no numbers reported.
In Virginia, workshops were held on how to fold pocket flags, enabling members to go out and teach others. In New York, Auxiliary members made it a point to visit their legislative representatives during the Washington DC Conference. This is leadership in action, sharing the mission with Capitol Hill! In North Carolina, members decided to change leadership by holding an Auxiliary Fair Day. The event included booths designed to teach members about various programs, activities, and — the best part — how to have fun while serving the Auxiliary mission.

Departments went back to basics by creating short and concise handouts that explain programs and projects that allow members to choose what they want to explore next. This method covers many areas of the entire ALA Centennial Strategic Plan. In Delaware, units worked the program using a teamwork approach, rotating various tasks through team members to accomplish the end result. They believe members will be able to more quickly develop the skills and knowledge of the program or activity with this method.

In Massachusetts, leaders realized the need to educate members on how to communicate using technology and how to use basic meeting procedures. They also explained the roles of officers and chairmen, so that members knew what would be expected of them.

In Montana, units used social time to work on projects together that cultivated conversations on various Auxiliary programs. In these intimate settings, members were able to share their thoughts and ideas about future plans.

In Nebraska, members were urged to get acquainted with the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan, especially to nurture a culture of goodwill at all levels. Units provided training at meetings to maintain positive attitudes at ALA events.

North Dakota distributed the New Member Kit to all members as a reminder of why they joined the organization and to promote Service Not Self to their members. Wyoming reported that mentors worked with new members and their officers as one important way to ensure the future of the Auxiliary.

In Texas, the retiring chairman shares all materials she used with the incoming chairman to ensure a smooth transition with the program. They stay in contact with each other during the year to encourage, explain, or critique how things are going. They report that they have this concept down to a fine science — mentoring at its finest.

Leadership is moving in the right direction, taking one step and one day at a time.

**LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**

Lisa Williamson, Alaska, Chairman

An advocate is defined as “one who defends, maintains, supports, or promotes a cause or the interests of another.” As American Legion Auxiliary members, we epitomize that.

As part of their year-end narrative, department Legislative chairmen were asked to answer the following three questions:

*How many times did members contact their national elected officials about legislative priorities of The American Legion?* Continuing our precedent, dating back to the original GI Bill, women tend to be the letter writers, and our ALA members were no exception. Members contacted their Congressional delegation by letters, emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, social media, websites, faxes, and teleconferences — making personal contact more than 18,000 times this year alone. It didn’t stop at Congress; one Florida member was able to establish a working relationship with the White House Public Information staff.

*What Legislative activities did members attend in their communities and departments?* At home, American Legion Family events attract elected officials. Candidates must be visible in their home districts as they run for elected office, making it easier for our members to personally meet with them. Many departments took advantage of the election process to hear candidates’ stands.
The American Legion Family hosted legislative receptions, luncheons, “Greet and Meet” forums, barbecues, pig roasts, golf tournaments, and breakfasts — always remembering to invite political candidates from all sides. Many units partnered with their posts to host Meet the Candidate nights. And what better time to ask pointed questions than at a Legion Family convention or conference?

Many unit members attended a wide range of events to discuss the concerns of veterans and military servicemembers. They gathered at town hall meetings, council meetings, borough meetings, village meetings, coffee meetings, fairs, and carnivals. Members were surprised at how accessible and responsive our elected officials were; they really did want to hear from their constituents.

*How did members develop relationships with their elected officials?* Relationships were key with the elected official and his/her staff! As ALA National President Sharon Conatser stressed, two-way communication between national leadership and staff, departments, units, and members was paramount! Once the relationship was developed, it was important to nurture it. Developing a relationship with your Congressman can be as easy as writing an email.

Remember: Our elected officials are human too. They go to church, shop at the grocery store, and attend their children’s sporting events. Traditionally, we make personal contact with them in Washington, D.C. or our state capitals. Face-to-face contact can happen back at home in your community.

South Dakota is a state where elected officials know the people in their district, much like family. As a result, ALA members had easy access to them. An example is the ALA unit in Springfield: Members attended the Springfield Veterans Memorial Dedication on Oct. 25, 2015, and had the opportunity to speak with several elected officials. They were recognized and respected for their work, and their input was often garnered.

One member in Tennessee met with U.S. Rep. Diane Black in her office in Gallatin during Congress’ recess. The member spoke with Black about The American Legion’s legislative priorities. As a result of that conversation, the ALA member discovered that Black also is an ALA member, and her husband is a veteran. You can bet she empathizes with veterans issues, and the members know they can count on her support.

A strong military and national defense comes at a price, but it should not be the veteran or the military making those sacrifices. As advocates for these men and women, we must help Keep Our Promise to ensure their benefits remain intact. It is our mission!

**MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE**

*Vickie Koutz, Indiana, Chairman*

I am proud to say the ALA Membership team worked really hard with 100 percent reporting at the end of the year.

In reading department membership reports, I realized how much members of this wonderful organization love our veterans. It also gave me pause to reflect on all the brave men and women who lost their lives for our freedom. Our membership honors them.

When our national president said she wanted more personal contact this year, the Department of Florida took that challenge to heart. Each district was asked to host offsite membership drives. One was hosted at the local Harley Davidson shop and another at Tyndall Air Force Base Officers Spouse Club. Others took advantage at community events. Department Membership Chairman Ann King-Smith invited members to log into their department Facebook page every Wednesday night and talk about strategies, successes, and goals. Everything they did seemed to work. At the time this report was written, their department had been No. 1 in membership for 12 consecutive weeks.
Hawaii members worked hard on retaining and gaining membership. The Department of Mississippi sponsored a boot camp where informational folders were given out to take back to their units. Puerto Rico members were challenged to be more proactive and talk to everyone they met about the programs and all the work the Auxiliary does to help our veterans and their families.

Throughout the year, New York members worked hard by sending recruitment letters, hosting early bird dinners, meet and greets, paying dues for shut-ins, and providing membership cards inside of get-well cards.

A Massachusetts unit held a meat shoot and paid all their members’ dues if they were 70 years or older, as long as they had been a member for at least three years.

The Missouri Auxiliary addressed Legionnaires in their department and stressed the importance of gifting Auxiliary membership to eligible female family members. A follow-up article was published in The American Legion newspaper.

The highlight of Kansas’ year was chartering an eUnit, while the Department of Michigan had seven requests for new units. To date, two have received their charters.

Alaska reported they were one of the departments that increased membership. The Department of Arizona created a membership training team that traveled to each of their districts to speak on membership and held training sessions on how to fill out forms.

Alabama units not only collected senior dues, they went a step further and paid Junior, Gold Star, and Blue Star members’ dues.

Minnesota leadership followed the guidelines of the national Unit Guide Book when they created their own department-specific Member Handbook. South Dakota members created their own Member Guide as part of their strategic plan.

In West Virginia, each unit was challenged to get one new member for the month of April. This idea worked; 18 units received at least one new member.

A Wisconsin member did a radio interview, giving a short history of the Auxiliary and why women in the community should join. New Hampshire’s theme this year was H.A.T.S. (Honor All The Servicemen and Women), a great way to show who we are.

The department Membership chairman from Wyoming asked members to remember why they joined the American Legion Auxiliary and to keep honoring the veterans they joined through, and all veterans past and present.

To the Wild Women of the Wild, Wild West, the Eastern Division Angels, Northwestern Winners, Central Division All Stars, and the Southern Spirit Ladies, I thank you one and all for stepping up to each challenge we threw your way this year.

NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE
Kathy Daudistel, Kentucky, Chairman

In true Service Not Self fashion, American Legion Auxiliary members embraced ALA National President Sharon Conatser’s theme and kept the promise to our veterans, servicemembers, and their families every day.

A favorite activity across all departments was sending care packages to deployed troops. Members spent many hours collecting snacks, socks, quilts, pillows, local treats, and homemade goodies to mail. In many cases, personal letters or cards were included in the packages. A unit from Patchogue, N.Y., sent specially made canine booties to protect military K-9’s paws from the hot sand. A member of Unit 315 in the Department of South Dakota started a program called Operation Warm Hugs. Having experienced deployment herself, the member recognized the importance of a clean pillowcase after returning from maneuvers. The unit collected homemade treats and paired them with creatively decorated pillowcases. This year, members shipped more than 300 pillowcases filled with treats to troops.

Minnesota members worked together as a Legion Family, and, in conjunction with local businesses, to operate an annual event called “Shop, Ship, and Share” at the local mall. The idea is simple: Shop at the mall, ship a package without going to the post office,
and share by supplying postage and/or items to be sent. As a result of this event, more than 800 boxes were packaged and shipped to troops overseas.

When servicemembers deployed, units helped take care of their families at home. Members invited the family to unit meetings and functions. They offered to assist with everyday things like lawn cutting, babysitting, and providing school supplies for their children. Pairing up with Family Readiness Groups proved to be a success; units hosted seasonal parties for children, dinners for the families, and other special events geared toward families of those deployed.

More than 2,000 units reported participating in POW/MIA activities and initiatives. Many units hosted ceremonies and invited the community to join in. A Massachusetts unit participated in a ceremony aboard a ship where names of the POW/MIAs were read and a flower was thrown into the harbor in memoriam. The ALA National Security Facebook group was used to alert members when the remains of missing servicemembers were identified. Units used this information to work with their families to honor them when their remains returned home.

ALA members also distributed Blue Star and Gold Star Banners throughout the nation. Units hosted ceremonies, dinners, and teas to honor these families. Members also went to local schools and explained the meaning of the banners to children. Unit 109 in the Department of North Carolina held a Gold Star ceremony to honor Gold Star Family members and their fallen heroes in a solemn candlelight service. ALA Illini Girls State held a Blue Star ceremony to recognize and present a Blue Star sticker to those citizens with immediate family members in the military. This year, 1,700 Blue Star Banners and 23 Gold Star Banners were presented to families across the country.

Other member activities included supporting ROTC programs by providing donations, medals and certificates; supporting Operation Comfort Warriors; welcome home ceremonies; and coupon clipping. Members also worked with the Red Cross to sponsor and participate in blood drives, with 93 members becoming qualified in Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and many units offering community classes on emergency preparedness. In addition, 17 ALA members served as career eMentors to 44 veterans and military spouses.

ALA members did an exemplary job of fulfilling the mission and we look forward to “Keeping the Promise” next year and beyond!

**PAST PRESIDENTS PARLEY COMMITTEE**

Janet Jefford, Connecticut, Chairman

Through our Past Presidents Parley Program, ALA members who have served as presidents at all levels have the opportunity to model civility, loyalty, and goodwill as they work to build a strong future for the Auxiliary and live our motto of Service Not Self. Past President Parleys continued to support the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary by reaching out specifically to women veterans in need of assistance. The heroes received gifts, personal care items, cards and letters, holiday baskets, afghan blankets, quilts, and clothing. Their service to our country was recognized with citations, plaques, and certificates. Other events included holiday festivities, luncheons, card parties, and pizza parties. Many chairmen noted that the veterans loved to reminisce and tell their stories, and the volunteers loved listening. Chairman Donna Blattenberger from Massachusetts wrote, “Most importantly, our members give them their time and friendship. We have become so attached. We are like family. Sometimes it’s not about the gift but what it means to the veteran. One lady loved hats, so we brought her one. She didn’t need the hat, but it made her feel good.”

Many units and departments reported some unique ways of reaching out to women veterans. Unit 134 in Massachusetts assisted a female veteran experiencing stress and anxiety due to her financial situation. They fixed her car, gave her grocery gift certificates, and helped her to get into low-rent housing. During a Lady Veteran’s Luncheon in Madeira
Beach, Fla., 16th District President Dee Bell was told that the VA did not provide the women with feminine items or female pajamas. To restore these veterans’ self-esteem, each unit in the district collected those items valued at more than $2,000. They truly lived the Department of Florida’s theme of “From the Service of One, Comes the Support of Many.” The Department of Maryland Past President Parley chose as its project the Women’s Clinic at the Washington VAMC. The PPP raised $1,535 for preconception counseling literature for women with PTSD, hopefully helping to raise self-esteem and confidence in their skills.

Past presidents at all levels continued their support to the organization by accepting that they can make a difference through mentoring and supporting current and future leaders, strengthening their units and departments, and fostering a culture of goodwill. Sound familiar? Check out the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan.

At Tennessee’s mid-winter conference, two Past Department Presidents held a membership and leadership luncheon with games and prizes, while mentoring members to take leadership roles. At the end of the department convention, they conducted training for all incoming officers. In Iowa, 24 Past Department Presidents actively mentored younger members. This year, the PPP joined in the efforts of the Cavalcade of Memories committee. Using the department president’s theme, “they are walking together… back to the future.”

Thank you to these departments for their reports: Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia.

PPPs are doing outstanding work supporting our women veterans and recognizing their service. They are awarding scholarships, especially for youth interested in medical careers. They are celebrating the good work done by our members by recognizing their Unit Member of the Year. They continue to recognize that, as past leaders, they must share their knowledge, mentor, and guide future leaders through positive words and actions. Quoting the words of Charlotte Connors, Tennessee PPP chairman, “Our past presidents are a very special and important part of our history, but we must not forget that they are still needed as a very important part of our future.”

**POPPY COMMITTEE**

Lori Skallerud, Minnesota, Chairman

Thanks to the American Legion Auxiliary’s enthusiastic members, the beautiful red poppy, which symbolizes the sacrifices made by our veterans, has come alive across the nation.

Unit members shared the story of Moina Michael, “The Poppy Lady,” along with the poem “In Flanders Field,” during visits to schools and churches in their communities. The story and the poem inspired many children to enter the Poppy Poster Contest. Some of the past winning entries were reprinted onto thank-you cards that are now available through American Legion Flag & Emblem Sales.

One department helped our program grow by ordering enough poppy kits to make 150,000 poppies. Poppy proclamations were signed and publicized before local poppy distribution days. One department took a proclamation to their state representatives and senators while they were in session. The legislatures displayed their poppies clipped to their microphones. ROTC members helped distribute poppies in some local areas.

While our senior and Junior members were busy distributing poppies, visiting schools, community functions, and other events, they diligently wore their ALA-branded attire to promote a visual image of the Auxiliary along with a direct connection to the poppy. Several departments used the poppy at their ALA Girls State sessions, educating the girls about the poppy and how to make them.

As part of their projects, Little Miss Poppy and Miss Poppy candidates distributed poppies with their units and placed poppies at Memorial Day events in remembrance of deceased veterans.
One department made a poppy wreath, and another made a poppy anchor. These memorials were ceremoniously dropped into a river. As they floated away, they left a trail of red in the water, symbolizing blood shed, the very meaning of the poppy.

The 2013 American Legion resolution allows the types of poppy items distributed by our members to expand beyond the traditional veteran-made red crepe poppy that we all know and love. Our members are using the power of social media to share ideas that support this resolution. The official ALA Poppy Facebook Group has grown exponentially over the past year. It is a wonderful source of heartwarming poppy stories and pictures of members of all ages working our mission and spreading the story of the Poppy!

Members have become very creative in their poppy making. They made poppies from felt, yarn, plastic bottle bottoms, and countless other items. We even have a poppy cookie recipe. Poppy cookies, felted poppies, crocheted poppies and even poppy jewelry can be found on our American Legion Auxiliary NHQ’s Poppies Pinterest board.

We are excited to announce that the newly updated American Legion Auxiliary Poppy Program Guide is available! You can download it free from the ALA national website or purchase it from Emblem Sales. The guide answers many common questions regarding the use of Poppy Funds and more!

ALA members have again stepped up and shown their pride and commitment to the Poppy Program and to the Auxiliary. As we continue to work together with The American Legion Family, our Juniors, ROTC, and others, our poppy story will continue to bring visibility and awareness of the Auxiliary for many generations.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

Elaine Mackenzie, Vermont, Chairman

The purpose of the Public Relations program is to promote to the public and our membership who we are, what we do, and why we matter. Our biggest challenge every day is to increase our visibility in the community as we serve our veterans, our military, and their families.

Using the guidance of the American Legion Auxiliary Centennial Strategic Plan, Goal 5, “With The American Legion, Build Brand Loyalty,” members, units, and departments made tremendous progress in promoting themselves while participating in color guards, Poppy Days, dinners for veterans, ALA Girls State, essay contests in the schools, stand down events, gift shops, and volunteering at VA medical centers. Our members used social media, press releases, cable TV and radio shows, bulletin boards, and public service announcements toward this goal.

Our first strategy was to define our brand identity and promise. In Virginia, units were challenged by the theme “Don’t Be The Best Kept Secret In Your Town.” California increased the number of members who subscribe to the national ALA eNews and eBulletin by nearly 10 percent. Units and departments continued to publish internal newsletters, a truly effective way to make the membership feel engaged and excited to remain a part of the organization. Facebook, Twitter, and email have been used to remind members of upcoming meetings and events.

Units reported going out into their communities to local Chambers of Commerce, churches, schools, and other veterans service organizations to make speeches and present awards in an effort to build awareness and preference for the ALA brand. Many units and departments used ALA public service announcements at their local television stations.

Many departments participated in “Ring Your Bell” contests, a friendly competition to see which unit could be named the most times in the media or public, which works to recognize brand loyalty and excellence in promotion of The American Legion Family brand. New Hampshire took it a step further with its highly successful “Brand Me Loyal” contest, which highlighted photographs of members wearing their ALA apparel. Junior Auxiliary members proved especially adept at building brand loyalty; they wore their
emblems during projects in their communities, used social media, and shared the poppy story.

Units and departments invested in internal and external marketing communications by building websites and purchasing advertising space in local papers. Iowa created a new Facebook page designed especially for nonmembers to create awareness of the ALA and our programs. North Dakota set up a communication committee so units could easily share their events on the department website. Illinois started a closed Facebook group to share pictures of events with members who were unable attend, giving them a front-row seat feeling. Some departments reported they purchased the editable ALA public service announcement for radio and television.

Units continued to develop new websites to allow easier communication with their members and communities. Units and departments were creative in their use of social media, including making YouTube videos and scheduling flash mobs in public places.

It is exciting to know that the more comfortable American Legion Auxiliary members get in promoting themselves and the organization, the easier it is to think of new ways to participate! Many departments reported that the more we promote ourselves, the easier it is to get and retain members, ensuring our Auxiliary will be “Keeping the Promise” far into the future.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION COMMITTEE
Diane Duscheck, Wisconsin, Chairman

Service Not Self was more than a slogan to American Legion Auxiliary members actively engaged in Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation activities. Our mission to support caregivers proved beneficial for both veterans and their caregivers. Unit members traveled many miles to provide or prepare meals, clean homes, do yard work, help with laundry, run errands, and drive veterans to appointments. Even family pets received special care; we offered pet-sitting services when veterans were away from their homes.

To support the ALA mission and enhance the lives of military abroad and veterans at home, Georgia’s Cummings Unit 307 stepped up to the plate. Although the unit has only 38 members, these women sent more than 10,000 packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan over the years. At home, these same members have been helping a local 99-year-old World War II veteran by assisting with personal needs, paying bills, filing taxes, and other tasks. In Puerto Rico, Auxiliary members enhanced the lives of veterans at home by serving coffee, donuts, and goodies at VA and outpatient clinic facilities, providing transportation for appointments, and offering coffee and sandwiches for veterans after lab appointments.

In California, ALA members from East Pasadena Unit 280 actively sought out homeless veterans to provide assistance. They logged more than 12,000 hours to comb bridges, highways, parking lots, hill sides, and skid rows in their search for homeless veterans to offer them a hand up and a transition to a better life. Even during Christmas and New Year’s holidays, they were out searching with the Vet Hunters. Homeless veterans can choose to accept the hand up and get off the street or not. Veterans choosing to remain homeless still receive weekly lunches from ALA members. Through their efforts, unit members have seen 425 veterans successfully removed from the streets.

As the Rhode Island Unit 34 Membership chairman studied the names on the membership roster, she noticed about 30 names that were unknown by current active members. Most of these unknown members had not been active for at least 30 to 40 years. This year, the Membership chairman sent every member flyers, news items about the unit, and solicited donations. As a result, one previously inactive member wanted to contribute items to a unit-hosted bazaar and purchase bricks in memory of her husband and in honor of her son for the post’s memorial brick patio. It was soon discovered that this octogenarian also helped a WWII veteran and friend of her late husband three times every week, cooking lunch, and cleaning up a bit in his house. Over the year, this member’s Service to Veterans
toted 624 hours. A second longtime member, who was just helping a friend, had volunteered four hours every week for the past five years. This unit was actively involved in the ALA Centennial Strategic Plan Goal 1, Enhance Membership Strength, by encouraging opportunities to engage and retain members.

Junior members in Maryland provided a unique holiday surprise for hospitalized veterans by delivering a message in a bottle. Empty water bottles were decorated with pompons, shiny stars, and colored glitter. Caring notes were written, rolled up, and tied with string, leaving a long tail on the string. The notes were inserted in the water bottle with the string tail hanging out of the bottle and the bottle cap screwed back on. The messages in the bottles were delivered on Christmas, Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, and Father’s Day. Veterans, military, and their families received the benefits of many helping Auxiliary hands.
INDEPENDENT AUDITOR’S REPORT

Members of the National Finance Commission
The American Legion National Headquarters
Indianapolis, Indiana

Report on Financial Statements
We have audited the accompanying consolidated financial statements of The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion"), which comprise the consolidated statements of financial position as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, and the related consolidated statements of activities and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

Management’s Responsibility for the Financial Statements
Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these consolidated financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. This includes the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of consolidated financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor’s Responsibility
Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these consolidated financial statements based on our audits. We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the consolidated financial statements are free of material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the consolidated financial statements. The procedures selected depend on the auditor’s judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the consolidated financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the entity’s preparation and fair presentation of the consolidated financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity’s internal control. Accordingly, we express no such opinion. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the consolidated financial statements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Opinion
In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the consolidated financial position of The American Legion National Headquarters as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Other Matter
Our audits were conducted for the purpose of forming an opinion on the consolidated financial statements as a whole. The consolidated statements of financial position and activities are presented for purposes of additional analysis of the consolidated financial statements rather than to present the financial position and results of operations of the individual companies, and are not a required part of the consolidated financial statements. Such information is the responsibility of management and was derived from and relates directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements. The information has been subjected to the auditing procedures applied in the audits of the consolidated financial statements and certain additional procedures, including comparing and reconciling such information directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements or to the consolidated financial statements themselves, and other additional procedures in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. In our opinion, the information is fairly stated in all material respects in relation to the consolidated financial statements as a whole.

Crowe Horwath LLP
Indianapolis, Indiana
April 29, 2016
The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidated Statements of Financial Position
December 31, 2015 and 2014

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<tr>
<td>Accrued vacation benefits</td>
<td>997,727</td>
<td>1,037,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>13,141,467</td>
<td>12,644,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>1,945,255</td>
<td>1,183,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>1,029,149</td>
<td>1,211,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life membership</td>
<td>22,919,052</td>
<td>21,204,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life memberships due to state and local posts</td>
<td>24,962,632</td>
<td>22,487,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95,935,914</td>
<td>89,028,506</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NET ASSETS</th>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>12,835,051</td>
<td>16,295,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily restricted</td>
<td>21,934,493</td>
<td>19,390,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently restricted</td>
<td>13,050,100</td>
<td>12,987,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total net assets</td>
<td>47,820,644</td>
<td>48,673,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$143,666,558</td>
<td>$137,702,169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
The American Legion National Headquarters  
Consolidated Statements of Activities  
Year ended December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue, gains and other support</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>Permanently</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitations</td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>703,326</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>703,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>2,230,783</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,230,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>11,239,150</td>
<td>3,263,091</td>
<td>137,774</td>
<td>14,640,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of trustee fees of $380,485</td>
<td>1,719,080</td>
<td>872,559</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,592,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses) - investments</td>
<td>277,286</td>
<td>(8,336)</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>270,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,731,530</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,773,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restriction</td>
<td>77,813,103</td>
<td>4,159,614</td>
<td>139,611</td>
<td>82,122,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total revenues, gains, and other support</td>
<td>79,109,939</td>
<td>2,872,778</td>
<td>139,611</td>
<td>82,122,328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expenses

| Salaries                        | 15,857,984  | -        | -           | 15,857,984 |
| Employee benefits               | 3,970,750   | -        | -           | 3,970,750 |
| Cost of sales - Legion          | 7,126,612   | -        | -           | 7,126,612 |
| Department and magazine costs   | 3,069,596   | -        | -           | 3,069,596 |
| Direct publications             | 11,373,424  | -        | -           | 11,373,424 |
| Executive, staff and program travel | 3,860,681 | -        | -           | 3,860,681 |
| Commission and committee        | 1,555,462   | -        | -           | 1,555,462 |
| Printing and postage            | 13,091,362  | -        | -           | 13,091,362 |
| Scholarships, grants and awards | 1,897,428   | -        | -           | 1,897,428 |
| Office and other operating      | 15,205,040  | -        | -           | 15,205,040 |
| Occupancy and usage             | 1,966,184   | -        | -           | 1,966,184 |
| Special projects and programs   | 2,242,405   | -        | -           | 2,242,405 |
|                                 | 81,015,928  | -        | -           | 81,015,928 |

Change in net assets from operations

| (1,905,989) | 2,872,778 | 139,611 | 1,106,400 |

Net unrealized loss – investments

| (580,751) | (328,089) | (67,346) | (1,386,186) |

Net change in PUFIL

| 751,375 | - | - | 751,375 |

Amortization of pension cost

| (2,470,872) | - | - | (2,470,872) |

Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost

| 556,164 | - | - | 556,164 |

Change in net assets

| (3,659,073) | 2,543,789 | 72,265 | (1,043,019) |

Net assets, beginning of year

| 16,295,124 | 13,390,704 | 12,987,835 | 48,673,663 |

Net assets, end of year

| $12,636,051 | $21,934,493 | $13,060,100 | $47,630,644

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
The American Legion National Headquarters  
Consolidated Statements of Activities  
Year ended December 31, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue, gains and other support</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporary Restricted</th>
<th>Permanently Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National membership dues</td>
<td>$ 26,208,428</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 26,208,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitations</td>
<td>8,126,608</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,126,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>728,969</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>728,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>3,150,729</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,150,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>12,243,214</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,243,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,490,471</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,490,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>8,026,121</td>
<td>2,489,835</td>
<td>319,639</td>
<td>10,838,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>1,626,964</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,626,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of trustee fees of $301,974</td>
<td>1,812,516</td>
<td>819,811</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,632,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses) - investments</td>
<td>(20,542)</td>
<td>9,623</td>
<td>(15,733)</td>
<td>(26,652)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,302,340</td>
<td>11,520</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,313,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74,896,848</td>
<td>3,330,769</td>
<td>303,906</td>
<td>75,531,523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net assets released from restriction | 762,975 | (762,976) | - | - |

Total revenues, gains, and other support | 75,659,824 | 2,567,793 | 303,906 | 75,531,523 |

Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporary Restricted</th>
<th>Permanently Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>15,028,006</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,028,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
<td>3,423,205</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,423,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales – Legion</td>
<td>6,683,745</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,683,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>3,063,870</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,063,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>11,520,926</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,520,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, staff and program travel</td>
<td>3,374,710</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,374,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,637,049</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,637,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>10,020,891</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,020,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants and awards</td>
<td>1,596,073</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,596,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>11,337,219</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,337,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>2,077,524</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,077,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>1,722,985</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,722,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets from operations</td>
<td>2,671,921</td>
<td>2,567,793</td>
<td>303,906</td>
<td>5,743,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net unrealized gains - investments</td>
<td>3,018,380</td>
<td>1,048,403</td>
<td>35,415</td>
<td>4,102,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in PUFIL</td>
<td>2,402,816</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,402,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendment of pension loss</td>
<td>(1,245,309)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(1,245,309)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>(8,672,230)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(8,672,230)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in net assets | (1,624,422) | 3,616,196 | 339,321 | 2,331,095 |

Net assets, beginning of year | 17,919,548 | 15,774,508 | 12,046,514 | 46,342,568 |

Net assets, end of year | $ 16,295,124 | $ 19,360,704 | $ 12,087,855 | $ 48,743,683 |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cash flows from operating activities</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets</td>
<td>$ 1,043,019</td>
<td>2,331,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustments to reconcile change in net assets to net cash from operating activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation expense</td>
<td>829,447</td>
<td>866,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss on disposal of property and equipment</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized (gain) loss on sale of investments</td>
<td>(270,787)</td>
<td>26,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealized (gain) loss on investments</td>
<td>1,386,085</td>
<td>(4,102,198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net change in Paid-Up-For-Life annuity</td>
<td>(751,375)</td>
<td>(2,402,816)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of pension loss</td>
<td>2,470,872</td>
<td>1,245,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>(956,164)</td>
<td>8,672,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions restricted for long-term purposes</td>
<td>(137,774)</td>
<td>(319,639)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>(274,483)</td>
<td>(2,711,468)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>(131,093)</td>
<td>(42,568)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>(1,440,418)</td>
<td>(467,169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>1,615,045</td>
<td>(1,376,341)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventories</td>
<td>(114,268)</td>
<td>(176,133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>32,157</td>
<td>37,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts and scholarships payable</td>
<td>2,234,063</td>
<td>(880,064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income</td>
<td>4,392,433</td>
<td>7,038,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>(1,017,532)</td>
<td>(959,806)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other accrued liabilities</td>
<td>721,911</td>
<td>464,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net cash from operating activities</td>
<td>7,545,173</td>
<td>7,244,655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cash flows from investing activities                                      |        |        |
| Purchase of property and equipment                                       | (438,840) | (637,619) |
| Purchase of investments                                                  | (60,419,613) | (56,413,668) |
| Sales and maturities of investments                                      | 52,309,666 | 60,267,085 |
| Investments in affiliate (CFA)                                           | 2,356  | 2,595 |
| Net cash from investing activities                                       | (8,546,431) | (8,781,507) |

| Cash flows from financing activities                                      |        |        |
| Contributions restricted for long-term purposes                          | 137,774 | 319,639 |
| Repayment on notes payable                                               | (186,800) | (162,800) |
| Net cash from financing activities                                       | (49,026) | 136,839 |

| Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents                     | (1,050,284) | 599,887 |
| Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year                             | 2,271,659  | 1,671,772 |
| **Cash and cash equivalents, end of year**                               | **$ 1,221,375** | **$ 2,271,659** |

Supplemental cash flows information

| Interest paid                                                            | $ 34,495 | $ 39,500 |
| Donated stock                                                            | -        | 24,730 |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
NOTE 1 – NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Nature of Organization: The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion") is a national veterans organization which was declared to be a corporate body by an Act of the United States Congress on September 16, 1919. According to the Original Act and Subsequent Amendments, the purpose of the Legion is "to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to promote peace and goodwill among the peoples of the United States and all the nations of the earth; to preserve the memories and incidents of the two World Wars and the other great hostilities fought to uphold democracy; to commit the ties and comradeship born of service; and to coordinate the efforts of its members to mutual helpfulness and service to their country."

Approximately 40-45% of the Legion's operating revenue is derived from membership dues (including amounts allocated for magazine subscriptions). An additional 12-13% is generated through advertising for the American Legion Magazine and 3-4% is generated through contributions from members and nonmembers. Another significant source of income is Emblem sales, which includes the sale of apparel, jewelry, and other items bearing the American Legion Emblem. Income is expended by the Legion on several different programs including The American Legion Magazine, Emblem sales, veterans' assistance and rehabilitation, youth programs and services. The Legion's youth programs include American Legion baseball, educational contests and Boy's Nation.

Principles of Consolidation: The consolidated financial statements include the accounts of The American Legion National Headquarters, The American Legion Charities ("ALC"), The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation ("ALEF"), and The National Emergency Fund ("NEF") (collectively, "the Legion"). All material inter-organization accounts and transactions have been eliminated in consolidation.

The American Legion Charities is a tax exempt trust established to solicit funds from individuals, organizations and corporations and to disburse said funds as may be directed to various Legion programs and charities. The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation, a tax-exempt Indiana corporation, was created to provide permanent funding for the rehabilitation of American veterans and assistance to orphans of veterans.

The National Emergency Fund is a tax-exempt trust established to provide gifts and grants to relieve suffering and alleviate financial hardship incurred by American Legion members, families and Posts.

Principal of Accounting: The financial statements have been prepared on the accrual basis of accounting in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America ("GAAP").

Use of Estimates in Preparation of Financial Statements: The preparation of financial statements in conformity with GAAP requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities and disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues, expenses, gains, losses, and other changes in net assets during the period reported. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Financial Statement Presentations: The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with GAG, which requires, among other things, that the financial statements report the changes in and total of each of the net asset classes based upon donor restrictions, as applicable. Net assets are to be classified as unrestricted, temporarily restricted and permanently restricted. The following classes of net assets are maintained:

- Unrestricted Net Assets
- Temporarily Restricted Net Assets
- Permanently Restricted Net Assets

Contributions for which the restrictions are met in the same period in which the contribution is received are also recorded as temporarily restricted revenue and released from restrictions.

Permanently Restricted Net Assets—The permanently restricted net asset class includes assets of the Legion for which the donor has stipulated that the contribution be maintained in perpetuity. Donor-imposed restrictions limiting the use of the assets or its economic benefit neither expire with the passage of time nor can be removed by satisfying a specific purpose.

Cash and Cash Equivalents—Cash and cash equivalents include cash on hand and less than 90 days from maturity of bank balances. The Legion maintains all of its cash deposits in banks and brokerage firms. This may result in a concentration of credit risk in the event of a severe regional financial failure. The maximum amount at risk is the excess of the deposit liabilities reported by the banks over the amounts that would have been covered by federal insurance. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. ("FDIC") insures deposits up to $250,000 per financial institution.

Accounts Receivable and Allowance for Uncollectible Accounts: The Legion bills members, posts, and departments for dues and bills agencies for advertising in the Legion Magazine. Interest is not normally charged on receivables.

Management establishes a reserve for losses on its accounts based on historic loss experience and current economic conditions. Losses are charged off to the reserve when management deems further collection efforts will not produce additional recoveries. Management estimated that no allowance was necessary for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

Inventory: Inventory consists of Emblem items held for sale, magazine paper and publication rights and is stated at the lower of cost or market using the first-in, first-out ("FIFO") method. Supplies which are not intended for sale are expensed when purchased.

Investments: Investments are carried at fair value. The fair values of investments are based on quoted market prices, where available. If quoted market prices are not available, fair values are based on quoted market prices of comparable instruments. Realized and unrealized gains and losses are reflected in the consolidated statements of activities. Premiums or discounts on investments are generally recognized at the time of acquisition or maturity.

Property and Equipment: Expenditures for property, equipment and improvements which substantially increase the useful lives of existing assets are greater than $5,500 are capitalized at cost. The Legion records depreciation on the straight-line method at rates designed to depreciate the costs of assets over their estimated useful lives. Buildings are depreciated on the straight-line method using a thirty year life. All other capital assets are depreciated over lives ranging from three to seven years.

Impairment of Long-Lived Assets: In accordance with GAG, the Legion reviews its property and equipment for impairment whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of an asset may not be recoverable. If the fair value is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognized for the difference. No impairment loss has been recognized during the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014.

Collections: The Legion owns many collectible military-related items and historical documents which were not recorded as they were acquired. These items have been appraised for insurance purposes; however, these items are not held for financial gain and therefore in accordance with GAG, have not been recorded on the statement of financial position.

Support and Revenue: The Legion reports gifts of cash and other assets as restricted support if they are recorded with donor stipulations that limit the use of the donated assets. When a donor restriction expires, that is, when a stipulated time restriction ends or purpose restriction is accomplished, temporarily restricted net assets are reclassified to unrestricted net assets and reported in the statement of activities of as net assets released from restrictions.

Dues Income and Expense: Dues are recognized as income over the applicable membership period, which is a calendar year. In addition to other methods of obtaining new members, the Legion uses direct mail and other direct marketing approaches. The income generated from direct membership solicitation is recognized over the applicable membership period (calendar year). The direct response expenses incurred in obtaining new members are deferred and recognized in the subsequent membership year.
Income Taxes: The Legion is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. ALC, NFLE and NFE are exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. None of the entities are considered to be a private foundation. They are subject to income tax on unrelated business income. In 2015 and 2014, the entities incurred no tax expense.

Current accounting standards require the entities to disclose the amount of potential benefit or obligation to be realized as a result of an examination performed by a taxing authority. For the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, management has determined that the entities do not have any tax positions that result in any uncertainties regarding the possible impact on the Legion’s financial statements. The entities do not expect the total amount of unrecognized tax benefits to significantly change in the next 12 months. The entities recognize interest and/or penalties related to income tax matters in income tax expense. The Legion did not have any amounts accrued for interest and penalties at December 31, 2015 and 2014.

Fair Value of Financial Instruments: The carrying amount of all financial instruments of the Legion, which include cash and cash equivalents, accounts receivable, beneficial interest in trust, investments, accounts payable, and notes payable, approximate fair value.

Expense Allocation: As disclosed in Note 16, expenses have been classified as program expenses, management expenses, and development and fund raising based on actual direct expenditures. Additionally, some expenses are allocated among departments based upon estimates of the amount of time spent by Legion employees performing services for these departments.

Subsequent Events: Management has performed an analysis of the activities and transactions subsequent to December 31, 2015, to determine the need for any adjustments or disclosures to the financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2015. Management has performed the analysis through April 29, 2016, the date the financial statements were available to be issued.

NOTE 2 – COLLECTIONS

The Legion owns many collectible military related items and historical documents which were not recorded as they were acquired. It is often impracticable to determine a value for collections and accordingly, the Legion has concluded that they need not be capitalized. Those items have been appraised for insurance purposes and are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appraisal date</th>
<th>Replacement value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War I Posters</td>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II Posters</td>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Unit Histories</td>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Collection</td>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Collection</td>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 3 – INVESTMENT IN AFFILIATE

The Legion, in conjunction with approximately 120 other organizations, has created a nonprofit corporation known as The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. (“CFA”) for the purpose of aiding in the campaign to secure a constitutional amendment empowering the Congress and the States to enact legislation to protect the Flag of the United States of America from physical desecration.

CFA recognized a change in net assets of $2,356 and $2,593 in 2015 and 2014, respectively. Accordingly, the Legion’s investment in CFA has been changed by these amounts and corresponding adjustments have been reflected in unrestricted net assets for 2015 and 2014.

NOTE 4 – BENEFICIAL INTEREST IN CHARITABLE LEAD TRUST

The ALEF has been named a beneficiary of a charitable lead trust. Under the charity’s terms, the ALEF is to receive quarterly distributions in the amount of $9,919 until December 2020, or until the funds of the trust are exhausted. Based on the terms of the trust and a 2.5% discount rate in 2015 and a 2.88% discount rate in 2014, the present value of future benefits expected to be received by the ALEF is estimated to be $183,743 and $217,900 at December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

NOTE 5 – FAIR VALUE OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Fair value is defined as the price that would be received for an asset or paid to transfer a liability (an exit price) in the Legion's principal or most advantageous market for the asset or liability in an orderly transaction between market participants on the measurement date.

GAAP establishes a fair value hierarchy which requires an entity to maximize the use of observable inputs and minimize the use of unobservable inputs when measuring fair value. GAAP describes three levels of inputs that may be used to measure fair value:

Level 1: Quoted prices for identical assets or liabilities in active markets that the entity has the ability to access as of the measurement date.

Level 2: Significant other observable inputs either than Level 1 prices such as quoted prices for similar assets or liabilities; quoted prices in markets that are not active; or inputs that are observable or can be corroborated by observable market data.

Level 3: Significant unobservable inputs that reflect a reporting entity’s own assumptions about the assumptions that market participants would use in pricing an asset or liability.

In many cases, a valuation technique used to measure fair value includes inputs from multiple levels of the fair value hierarchy. The lowest level of significant input determines the placement of the entire fair value measurement in the hierarchy.

The fair value of money markets and common stock are based on quoted prices in active markets. (Level 1 inputs) The fair value of U.S. Government and agency obligations, asset backed securities, corporate bonds, and state and municipal bonds are based on quoted market prices of similar securities with similar due dates using the market approach. (Level 2 inputs) Common stock and asset backed securities are not held by the Legion, but are held in the defined benefit plan assets which are disclosed in Note 15.

The fair value of beneficial interest in trust assets is determined using the income approach and is based on a valuation model that calculates the present value of the estimated distributed income. The valuation model incorporates assumptions that market participants would use in estimating future distributed income. The Legion is able to compare the valuation model inputs and results to widely available published industry data for reasonableness; however, the Legion is unable to redeem the assets of the trust and only receives distributions. (Level 3 inputs)

Assets and Liabilities Measured on a Recurring Basis: Assets and liabilities measured at fair value on a recurring basis are summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2015 using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and municipal bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tables below present a reconciliation and statement of activities classification of gains and losses for all assets measured at fair value on a recurring basis using significant unobservable inputs (Level 3) for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014:

### Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2014, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 217,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>12,589,094</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government obligations</td>
<td>47,838,137</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and municipal bonds</td>
<td>26,701,351</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>30,911,641</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 12,589,094</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 217,900</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables below present a reconciliation and statement of activities classification of gains and losses for all assets measured at fair value on a recurring basis using significant unobservable inputs (Level 3) for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014:

### Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2014, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 217,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>12,589,094</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government obligations</td>
<td>47,838,137</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and municipal bonds</td>
<td>26,701,351</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>30,911,641</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 12,589,094</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 217,900</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Benefit Interest in Trust

| Beginning balance, Jan. 1, 2015 | $ 217,900 |
| Change in value of split interest agreements | 7,519 |
| Distributions from trust | (39,626) |
| **Ending balance, Dec. 31, 2015** | **$ 185,743** |

### Benefit Interest in Trust

| Beginning balance, Jan. 1, 2014 | $ 255,127 |
| Change in value of split interest agreements | 2,449 |
| Distributions from trust | (39,626) |
| **Ending balance, Dec. 31, 2014** | **$ 177,900** |

**NOTE 6 – PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT**

The Legion’s property and equipment, and the related accumulated depreciation at December 31, 2015 and 2014 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C., real estate</td>
<td>$ 80,000</td>
<td>$ 80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>5,621,656</td>
<td>5,603,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>389,264</td>
<td>389,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis real estate</td>
<td>4,682,610</td>
<td>4,052,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>389,264</td>
<td>389,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>4,682,610</td>
<td>4,052,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction in progress</td>
<td>87,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture, fixtures and equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Headquarters, Indianapolis</td>
<td>6,800,866</td>
<td>7,077,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>766,923</td>
<td>770,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less accumulated depreciation</td>
<td>17,740,719</td>
<td>18,059,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,277,164</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,662,843</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Depreciation expense for the years ended, December 31, 2015 and 2014 was $5,225,447 and $5,662,783, respectively.

**NOTE 7 – LONG-TERM DEBT**

In 2013, the Legion refinanced its note payable related to the Geiger Operations Center. Principal and interest is payable in monthly installments with final payment due December 3, 2020. The stated interest rate is 3.35% plus the 30-day London Interbank Offered Rate ("LIBOR"). The outstanding balance on long-term debt is $5,025,149 and $1,211,949 as of December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

The future maturities of the long-term debt are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th><strong>Total</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ 191,200</td>
<td>$ 191,200</td>
<td>$ 205,200</td>
<td>$ 211,200</td>
<td>$ 216,349</td>
<td>$ 1,025,149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interest expense was $34,495 and $39,500 for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014, respectively.

As a strategy to mitigate exposure to the risk of interest rate fluctuations, the Legion entered into an interest rate swap agreement on the long-term debt on December 3, 2013. This interest rate swap has been designated as a derivative and provides for the Legion to receive interest from the counterparty at the 30-day LIBOR rate plus 1.35% and to pay interest to the counterparty at a fixed rate of 2.96% on a notional amount of $5,025,149 and $1,211,949 at December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014, respectively. The interest rate swap matures in 2020. Under the agreement, the Legion pays or receives the net interest amount monthly, with the monthly settlements included in interest expense.

**NOTE 8 – LEASES**

The Legion has several non-cancelable operating leases, primarily for facilities, computer equipment, and copiers that expire at various dates through 2093. Rent expense under these leases for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014 was $482,673 and $457,773, respectively.

Minimum lease commitments are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th><strong>Total</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ 474,483</td>
<td>$ 255,229</td>
<td>$ 67,275</td>
<td>$ 60,220</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ 857,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the Legion has a lease with the State of Indiana for rental of the National Headquarters Building in Indianapolis which expired on June 30, 2013. The Legion is operating on a month-to-month basis until a new lease agreement extending the lease term is finalized. According to the terms of the lease, the Legion is required to maintain the interior of the building, and provide adequate insurance on the building in lieu of lease payments. The cost of maintenance for 2015 and 2014 was $595,540 and $591,343, respectively. Insurance coverage is included in the Legion’s general insurance policy.

**NOTE 9 – PAID-UP-FOR-LIFE MEMBERSHIP FUND**

The National Executive Committee approved the establishment of a life membership plan available to any member of a participating department. In accordance with the plan, the assets of the Paid-Up-For-Life ("PUFL") Membership Fund are included in unrestricted, board designated net assets and segregated in a trust account from which funds equal to the annual class of life members are withdrawn for current operations each year. The trust agreement provides that the Legion has the right to withdraw part or all of the assets of the trust account and to modify or terminate the trust agreement at its discretion.

Under the terms of the PUFL program, participating member’s national, state and local dues are paid by the Legion for the remainder of the individual’s life. Management has estimated and recognized a liability for the future payments to state and local Legion organizations. Likewise, management has deferred recognition of the national dues portion of the members’ payment. Deferred PUFL dues are recognized in annual amounts equal to the national dues in effect each.
year. The liability and deferred revenue amounts are estimated by the Legion's actuaries using PBIL membership summaries and discount rates comparable to the Legion's recent investment performance.

NOTE 10 – RESTRICTED AND RESERVE DESIGNATED FUNDS
The restricted fund is designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as unrestricted, board designated net assets. Earnings of the restricted fund, along with the principal, can be expended only upon recommendation of the National Finance Commission and a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee at two successive meetings. It is the policy of the Legion to transfer 10% of the prior year's defined net income from operations to the restricted fund. The Legion made no transfers to the restricted fund in 2015 and 2014.

The reserve fund is also designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as unrestricted, board designated net assets. However, earnings of the reserve fund may be used for the general operations of the Legion. The principal can be expended only by action of the Legion at its national convention, or by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee in two successive meetings not less than 60 days apart.

NOTE 11 – TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS
Temporarily restricted net assets are donor-restricted for specific purposes. At December 31, 2015 and 2014 the restricted purposes are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund/Program</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Groves Recreation Fund</td>
<td>$999,271</td>
<td>$1,070,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarships</td>
<td>1,074,639</td>
<td>2,089,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legacy Fund</td>
<td>11,058,389</td>
<td>9,436,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>4,622,866</td>
<td>3,906,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>407,899</td>
<td>403,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Comfort Warriors</td>
<td>2,062,618</td>
<td>1,657,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. Daye</td>
<td>308,564</td>
<td>333,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung American Legion Alumni Association</td>
<td>372,240</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>66,915</td>
<td>355,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21,934,403</td>
<td>19,390,704</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 12 – NET ASSETS RELEASED FROM RESTRICTION
Net assets were released from donor restrictions by incurring expenses satisfying the restricted purposes or by occurrence of other events specified by donors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose restrictions achieved</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Groves Recreation Fund</td>
<td>$21,469</td>
<td>$11,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships and grants</td>
<td>393,503</td>
<td>428,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Affairs &amp; Rehabilitation and</td>
<td>88,873</td>
<td>322,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Youth programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1,296,616</td>
<td>$762,979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 13 – PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS
Permanently restricted net assets represent donor-restricted gifts that have been invested and are to be maintained in perpetuity. Income from the Samsung scholarship fund is to be used to fund undergraduate scholarships for descendants of Korean War veterans and other wars in which U.S. servicemen and servicewomen participated. Income from the American Legion Endowment Fund is to be used to support the veterans affairs and rehabilitation and children and youth activities of the Legion.

At December 31, 2015 and 2014 the permanently restricted net assets are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund/Program</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarships</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>8,000,000</td>
<td>7,962,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$13,000,000</td>
<td>$12,962,835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 14 – ENDOWMENT COMPOSITION
The Legion's endowments include donor-restricted endowment funds and are comprised of two separate funds: the American Legion Endowment Fund and the Samsung scholarship fund. In accordance with GAAP, net assets associated with endowment funds, including funds designated by the National Executive Committee to function as endowments, are classified and reported based on the existence or absence of donor-imposed restrictions.

Interpretation of Relevant Laws: The National Executive Committee has interpreted the State Permanent Management of Institutional Funds Act ("SPMFIA") as requiring the preservation of the fair value of the original gift and of the gift date of the donor restricted endowment funds absent explicit donor stipulations to the contrary. As a result of this interpretation, the Legion classifies as permanently restricted net assets (a) the original value of gifts donated to the permanent endowment, (b) the original value of subsequent gifts to the permanent endowment, and (c) net accumulations in the permanent endowment made in accordance with the governing documents of the Legion. The remaining portion of the donor restricted endowment fund that is not classified in permanently restricted net assets is classified as temporarily restricted net assets until those amounts are appropriated for expenditure by the Legion in a manner consistent with the standard of prudence prescribed by SPMFIA. In accordance with SPMFIA, the Legion considers the following factors in making a determination to appropriate or accumulate donor-restricted endowment funds:

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund Type</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor restricted endowment funds</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Funds</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund Type</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor restricted endowment funds</td>
<td>$64,308</td>
<td>$2,166,616</td>
<td>$12,987,835</td>
<td>$15,000,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Funds</td>
<td>$64,308</td>
<td>$2,166,616</td>
<td>$12,987,835</td>
<td>$15,000,143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in endowment net assets for the year ended December 31, 2013:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>$64,308</td>
<td>$2,166,616</td>
<td>$12,987,835</td>
<td>$15,000,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment gains*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$428,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment income, net of fees</td>
<td>57,959</td>
<td>384,112</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Net Depreciation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total depreciation (realized and unrealized)</td>
<td>$12,270</td>
<td>$12,381</td>
<td>$6,509</td>
<td>$10,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total investment loss</td>
<td>$41,665</td>
<td>$301,931</td>
<td>$65,569</td>
<td>$278,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New gifts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3,177,224</td>
<td>$3,177,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure</td>
<td>$22,643</td>
<td>$493,195</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$468,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total net assets, end of year</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$1,974,952</td>
<td>$13,300,100</td>
<td>$15,087,052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Changes in Endowment Net Assets for the Year December 31, 2014:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily Restricted</th>
<th>Permanently Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$1,630,354</td>
<td>$12,646,514</td>
<td>$14,279,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment gain</td>
<td>$53,565</td>
<td>866,347</td>
<td>19,682</td>
<td>959,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New gifts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>319,639</td>
<td>373,659</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure</td>
<td>(117,873)</td>
<td>(330,215)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(448,088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, end of year</td>
<td>$(64,308)</td>
<td>$2,166,616</td>
<td>$12,387,835</td>
<td>$15,090,143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Return Objectives and Risk Parameters

- The Legion has adopted investment and spending policies for endowment assets that attempt to provide a predictable stream of funding to programs supported by its endowment while seeking to maintain the purchasing power of the endowment assets. Endowment assets include those assets of donor-restricted funds that the Legion must hold in perpetuity or for a donor-specified period(s). Under this policy, as approved by the National Executive Committee, the endowment assets are invested in a manner that is intended to produce income while assuming a low level of investment risk.

- The Legion adopts a long-term, rate-of-return objective for its endowment. Under this policy, investment returns are achieved through both capital appreciation (realized and unrealized) and current yield (interest and dividends). The Legion targets fixed-income securities to achieve its long-term return objectives within prudent risk constraints.

### Spending Policy and How the Investment Objectives Relate to Spending Policy

- The real estate investment trusts, real estate partnerships, mutual funds, private equity, hedge funds, and guaranteed investment certificates.

### Estimated Future Benefit Payments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated Future Benefit Payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$3,412,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$3,477,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$3,532,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>$3,518,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>$3,546,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-2025</td>
<td>17,912,792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The asset investment policy is a lower risk strategy with a primary objective of preservation of capital with an emphasis on long-term growth and generation of current income to provide adequate cash flows needed for benefit payments. The target asset allocation is 60-40% in fixed income and 40-60% in equities. Prohibited investments include real estate investment trusts, real estate partnerships, mutual funds, private equity, hedge funds, and guaranteed investment certificates.

The fair value of the Legion’s defined benefit plan assets at December 31, 2015 and 2014 are as follows. See Note 5 for descriptions of inputs for each type of asset.
### Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2015, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>$1,411,074</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government and agency obligations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9,344,375</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset backed securities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,773,398</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,309,374</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9,956,149</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity fund</td>
<td>4,924,044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common stock:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>1,405,024</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrials</td>
<td>2,015,537</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer discretionary</td>
<td>1,747,117</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer staples</td>
<td>1,471,941</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>1,171,123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>1,343,473</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financials</td>
<td>2,817,533</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>1,020,012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>2,819,932</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>338,193</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>210,104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued interest</td>
<td>171,239</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$22,897,512</td>
<td>$22,393,796</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2014, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>$3,371,390</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government and agency obligations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9,486,634</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset backed securities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,394,046</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,611,064</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,115,637</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common stock:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>625,585</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrials</td>
<td>2,750,812</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer discretionary</td>
<td>1,815,605</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer staples</td>
<td>1,796,463</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>1,349,353</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>2,530,406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financials</td>
<td>4,581,070</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>530,082</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>3,269,347</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>1,026,823</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>347,951</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued interest</td>
<td>368,996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$24,756,837</td>
<td>$25,197,741</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historical returns of multiple asset classes were analyzed to develop a risk-free real rate of return and risk premium for each asset class. The overall rate for each asset class was developed by combining a long-term inflation component, the risk-free real rate of return, and the associated risk premium. A weighted average rate was developed based on those overall rates and the target asset allocation of the plan.

**Weighted-average assumptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discount rate</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
<td>3.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected return on plan assets</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of compensation increase</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amounts of net loss and net prior service cost expected to be recognized as components of net periodic benefit cost for the year ending December 31, 2015 are $2,506,744 and $121,085, respectively.

**NOTE 16 – FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES**

The following represents a functional breakdown of the Legion's expenses by program and supporting services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program services</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans programs and services</td>
<td>$38,677,264</td>
<td>$37,312,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans, Children &amp; Youth activities</td>
<td>2,325,570</td>
<td>1,896,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41,003,264</td>
<td>39,209,130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supporting services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and general</td>
<td>16,554,732</td>
<td>15,613,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member development</td>
<td>10,916,799</td>
<td>9,567,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>12,541,193</td>
<td>8,397,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40,012,724</td>
<td>33,578,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$81,015,928</td>
<td>$72,787,993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Member development includes direct membership response advertising expense of $6,766,626 and $5,876,102 for the years ended December 31, 2015 and 2014.

**NOTE 17 – LITIGATION**

The Legion is currently involved in and/or has been mentioned as a defendant or co-defendant in several legal actions. It is the opinion of the national judge Advocate that these claims are without merit and any ultimate liability of the Legion with respect to these actions will not materially affect the financial statements of the Legion.
### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidated Statements of Financial Position
December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>Charities Fund</td>
<td>Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Fund</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$926,465</td>
<td>$174,028</td>
<td>$37,747</td>
<td>$84,135</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,291,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>6,003,486</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>56,360</td>
<td>(399,128)</td>
<td>5,662,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>715,705</td>
<td>19,451</td>
<td>50,805</td>
<td>35,229</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>832,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>3,816,808</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,858</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,813,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>4,004,549</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,004,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due from American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>2,818,625</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,818,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in affiliate (CFA)</td>
<td>14,374</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>185,743</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>185,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18,507,012</td>
<td>193,479</td>
<td>258,016</td>
<td>175,744</td>
<td>(3,399,128)</td>
<td>17,760,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investments</strong></td>
<td>General</td>
<td>10,760,717</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,760,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregated for Restricted and Reserved funds</td>
<td>33,246,316</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33,246,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund</td>
<td>21,266,174</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21,266,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarship fund</td>
<td>7,779,450</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,779,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing funds</td>
<td>5,778,612</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,778,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund</td>
<td>10,419,512</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,419,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,037,716</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,037,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,506,687</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,506,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Charities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,762,116</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,762,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>103,062,257</td>
<td>5,234,150</td>
<td>9,772,368</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>120,534,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property, plant and equipment: net</td>
<td>5,272,154</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,272,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$127,853,471</td>
<td>$3,437,359</td>
<td>$10,682,414</td>
<td>$4,022,170</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>$143,586,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LIABILITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable</td>
<td>3,022,029</td>
<td>400,405</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(399,128)</td>
<td>$3,033,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships payable</td>
<td>1,029,888</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,029,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to American Legion National Headquarters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits on emblem merchandise sales</td>
<td>384,952</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>384,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues</td>
<td>816,199</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>816,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income</td>
<td>21,236,699</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21,236,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income - direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>3,849,834</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,849,834</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accrued vacation benefits</td>
<td>597,727</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>597,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expenses</td>
<td>13,141,407</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,141,407</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>1,046,256</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,046,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>1,026,119</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,026,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income - Paid-Up-For-Life membership</td>
<td>22,915,052</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22,915,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life memberships due to state and local posts</td>
<td>24,962,632</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24,962,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>95,928,633</td>
<td>499,405</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>99,539,914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NET ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>American Legion</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>11,851,809</td>
<td>644,152</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,506,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily restricted</td>
<td>15,224,491</td>
<td>2,077,072</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>4,622,166</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21,244,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently restricted</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,060,100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,060,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net assets</strong></td>
<td>31,826,894</td>
<td>3,021,224</td>
<td>8,890,434</td>
<td>4,622,166</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41,360,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$127,853,471</td>
<td>$3,437,359</td>
<td>$10,682,414</td>
<td>$4,022,170</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>$143,586,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidated Statements of Financial Position
December 31, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion National Endowment Fund</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$1,853,594</td>
<td>$186,390</td>
<td>$20,705</td>
<td>$200,670</td>
<td>$2,271,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>5,300,048</td>
<td>405,497</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>34,241</td>
<td>(412,725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>622,298</td>
<td>4,363</td>
<td>61,468</td>
<td>23,118</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>1,578,478</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,840</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership fees</td>
<td>5,019,594</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due from American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>2,044,387</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in affiliate (CFA)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16,690</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Investments**
- General: 15,377,229
- Segregated for Restricted and Reserved Funds: 32,816,517
- Paid-Up-For-Life Membership Fund: 23,951,935
- Samsung scholarship fund: 7,524,422
- Building funds: 5,022,253
- Sept. 11 memorial scholarship fund: 9,653,418
- Special account - Endowment Fund: 4,652,077
- General account - Endowment Fund: -
- National Emergency Fund: 3,738,662
- American Legion Charities: 1,118,412
- Other: 97,656,249
- Property, plant and equipment, net: 5,692,843

**LIABILITIES**
- Accounts payable: $1,706,687
- Stockholders' liability: 1,041,590
- Due to American Legion National Headquarters: -
- Deposits on emblem merchandise sales: 229,037
- Deferred income: 524,823
- Deferred dues income: 21,357,070
- Deferred income - direct membership solicitation: 4,621,998
- Accrued vacation benefits: 1,037,750
- Accrued pension expense: 12,944,291
- Other liabilities: 1,183,321
- Notes payable: 1,271,949
- Deferred dues income - Paid-Up-For-Life Membership: 21,204,292
- Life memberships due to state and local posts: 22,487,839

**NET ASSETS**
- Unrestricted: 15,463,238
- Temporarily restricted: 13,955,119
- Permanently restricted: 5,000,000

**Total Net Assets**: 33,918,457

**Total Financial Assets and Liabilities**: $123,384,041

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See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidating Statements of Activities,
Year ended December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Endowment</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenues, gains and other support</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>703,326</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>703,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>13,104,677</td>
<td>1,637,008</td>
<td>137,774</td>
<td>614,515</td>
<td>(854,019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>2,297,939</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,297,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of fees</td>
<td>2,220,878</td>
<td>48,309</td>
<td>203,953</td>
<td>119,619</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses) - investments</td>
<td>280,888</td>
<td>(9,901)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment fund income</td>
<td>183,383</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(153,383)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,783,630</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(35,020)</td>
<td>2,773,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60,410,313</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,710,457</strong></td>
<td><strong>331,826</strong></td>
<td><strong>734,134</strong></td>
<td><strong>82,122,328</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Expenses

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>15,857,984</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,857,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
<td>3,070,790</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,070,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales - Legion</td>
<td>7,126,612</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,126,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>3,060,596</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,060,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>11,373,424</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,373,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, staff, and program travel</td>
<td>3,050,491</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,190</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,890,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,555,402</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,555,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>13,091,362</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,091,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants, and awards</td>
<td>1,336,281</td>
<td>1,206,406</td>
<td>183,583</td>
<td>43,700</td>
<td>(1,072,402)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>15,167,088</td>
<td>19,991</td>
<td>16,269</td>
<td>1,692</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>1,986,184</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,986,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>1,927,879</td>
<td>114,426</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>59,496,213</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,340,803</strong></td>
<td><strong>203,842</strong></td>
<td><strong>45,392</strong></td>
<td><strong>81,015,928</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                                |                                      |                           |                        |              |       |
| Change in net assets from operations | (70,900)                      | 369,574                   | 127,084                | 688,742      | -      | 1,106,400 |
| Net unrealized losses - investments | (1,173,344)                   | (81,364)                  | (67,881)               | (53,467)     | -      | (1,386,066) |
| Net change in Pufil            | 751,375                             | -                         | -                      | -            | 751,375   |
| Amortization of pension fees   | (2,470,872)                        | -                         | -                      | -            | (2,470,872) |
| Pension-related charges other than net periodic pension cost | 956,164                        | -                         | -                      | -            | 956,164   |
| **Total**                      | **(2,019,577)**                    | **288,190**               | **60,103**             | **625,275**  | (1,043,019) |
| Net assets, beginning of year  | 33,943,417                          | 2,733,944                 | 8,003,311              | 3,996,801    | -      | 48,673,663 |
| Net assets, end of year        | **$31,926,840**                     | **$3,021,224**            | **$8,060,414**         | **$4,672,166** | -      | **$47,303,644** |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidating Statements of Activities,
Year ended December 31, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Legion Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Charities</th>
<th>American Legion Emergency Fund</th>
<th>National Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenue, gains and other support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$26,208,428</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$-</td>
<td>$26,208,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>8,126,606</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,126,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>726,966</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>726,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>3,144,453,624</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,144,453,624</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem tams</td>
<td>12,243,214</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,243,214</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,490,471</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,490,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>8,626,640</td>
<td>1,351,866</td>
<td>310,630</td>
<td>762,353</td>
<td>(221,863) 10,636,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>1,386,994</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,386,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of fees</td>
<td>2,301,363</td>
<td>37,119</td>
<td>202,227</td>
<td>91,618</td>
<td>- 2,632,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses) - investments</td>
<td>(9,331)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(18,154)</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>- (26,652)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment Fund income</td>
<td>173,259</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(173,259)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,313,840</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,313,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>76,172,928</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,395,242</strong></td>
<td><strong>503,712</strong></td>
<td><strong>654,785</strong></td>
<td><strong>(365,162)</strong> <strong>76,531,523</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Expenses

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>15,928,806</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,928,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,423,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales - Legion</td>
<td>6,683,745</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,683,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>3,063,870</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,063,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>11,920,025</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,920,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive and staff travel</td>
<td>3,368,856</td>
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<td>5,854</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,374,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,637,849</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,637,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>10,020,891</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,020,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants and awards</td>
<td>1,406,642</td>
<td>345,040</td>
<td>173,259</td>
<td>65,570</td>
<td>(365,162) 1,591,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>11,313,832</td>
<td>9,414</td>
<td>12,237</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>- 11,337,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>2,077,524</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,077,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>1,668,314</td>
<td>64,671</td>
<td>191,350</td>
<td>67,311</td>
<td>(365,162) 1,722,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72,514,480</strong></td>
<td><strong>495,834</strong></td>
<td><strong>191,350</strong></td>
<td><strong>67,311</strong></td>
<td><strong>(365,162)</strong> <strong>72,737,804</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Change in net assets from operations | 3,656,478                    | 985,308                    | 312,362                        | 787,472              | - 5,743,620  |
| Net unrealized gains - investments | 3,855,302                    | 71,176                     | 36,435                        | 130,280              | - 4,102,198  |
| Net change in PUFL | 2,402,816                     | -                          | -                             | -                    | 2,402,816     |
| Amortization of pension loss | (1,245,309)                   | -                          | -                             | -                    | (1,245,309)   |
| Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost | (8,672,230)                   | -                          | -                             | -                    | (8,672,230)   |
| **Change in net assets** | **(543)**                    | **1,056,484**              | **351,797**                    | **523,757**          | - 2,331,005  |
| Net assets, beginning of year | 33,944,380                    | $1,675,560                 | $ 7,648,514                    | $ 3,073,134          | - $ 46,342,668 |
| **Net assets, end of year** | **33,943,417**               | **$ 2,733,044**            | **$ 8,000,311**                | **$ 3,995,891**      | **$ 46,673,663** |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.